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Fifty-second session

JUBILEE SESSION OF THE COMMISSION

At the Commission's fifty-second jubilee session, delegations made interventions on the reform process and how the Commission's new strategic directions to be adopted should strengthen the Commission as an instrument for the promotion of economic cooperation, peace and stability in the region. The statements made are reproduced hereafter in their original language, as provided to the secretariat. Only minor modifications of an editorial nature have been made.

A summary of the discussions during the Round Table on "Building cohesion in Europe: Technical answers to a political aspiration" and the Round Table on "ECE: Forging partnerships between governments, enterprises and NGOs", which took place during the session, is also given.

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STATEMENT BY MR. PAVLI ZERI, SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

This jubilee session of the Economic Commission for Europe is an important occasion not only for the celebration of its 50th anniversary, but also to provide the member countries with an opportunity to build on the achievements already reached a starting point for new challenges. We wish and hope that this Session contributes to the strengthening of the role of the Commission in the region.

I would also like to appraise the role of the Executive Secretary, Mr. Berthelot, as well as the Bureau's role in guiding the Commission in a very important and difficult time, which requires appropriate measures to be taken in order to enable the Commission to cope with new challenges and realities. We believe that the Plan of Action which has been largely and transparently negotiated, meets with the consensus of the member countries.

Today's Albania is a concrete testimony that proves how difficult the transition is and how careful the approach to it has to be. In spite of the encouraging macroeconomic statistics of these last years, it seems that it has been very difficult to achieve a smooth transition.

The situation in Albania remains serious. Law and legal institutions, order and stability have not yet been restored in some parts of the country. In this situation, the Government of National Reconciliation in Albania is making its best efforts to ensure emergency assistance, restore order and stability and prepare the new parliamentary elections.

The Government of National Reconciliation enjoys the support of the people in Albania, but it also counts on the support of the international community. I will take this opportunity to once more express Albania's gratitude to all the countries that have shown their willingness to contribute to and have already participated in the multinational Force in Albania.

The support of the international community, added to the longing of the Albanian people for peace and tranquillity and the efforts of the National Reconciliation Government have already started to produce the first satisfactory results. But stability in Albania cannot be guaranteed by the political and security activities alone. This process needs to be supported by a sustainable economy, through medium and long-term oriented assistance and programmes. We have optimistic expectations from the commitment of international financial institutions and we are encouraged by their willingness to help to promote the economic situation in Albania.

Albania's economy needs to undergo a reconstruction process. This cannot be achieved successfully without a backing up by the international community. At the Rome meeting of the European Union on 25 March, Albania's Prime Minister invited the Union to be, in cooperation with other regional and international financial institutions, a promoter for organizing an international conference for the future promotion of the Albanian economy. Albania is looking forward to a positive response. I make use of this opportunity to appeal to all the member countries here to support such a project. A Conference of that nature would be an appropriate forum for focusing on the current real economic needs of the country.

We are very pleased to approve today the Declaration on the Strengthening of Economic Cooperation in Europe. It is through this Declaration that we once again reaffirm the major values promoted by the Commission. The Commission has been an important factor for economic cooperation and recently for the integration of the economies in transition to the European and international standards. We highly appreciate this role and we would very much like to highlight the importance of a further and substantial performance in this direction to our region.

We share the major concern of the UN community about the need to reform the UN structures and enable them to reach a greater level of efficiency and pragmatism. That is why we fully support the Plan of Action which enables the ECE to maintain its importance and "raison d'être".

When speaking of economic cooperation, it is always important to avoid duplication through a close and full cooperation with all the structures that offer similar services in the region. We are convinced that this does not mean avoiding competition of ideas and solutions for questions of common interest. The fast growth towards a global and liberal economy requires the necessary grounds of interactivity between the economic multilateral structures. In this respect, coordination between the EU and the regional initiatives and activities is a must. A very good example in this respect is the cooperation with the economic dimension of the OSCE. But of very special importance are the concerted plans of action with the ECE and BSEC, CEI and SECI, as well as the operation in compliance with the EU policy in the region.

Especially the support of the ECE to SECI has been of an essential value. We believe that ECE can play an important role in giving a real regional dimension to the economic projects of this initiative. As we are aware of the fact that in activities like that, the ECE will certainly face the need for a more selective job, in order to offer real and effective opportunities through its regional advisers and to be able to help in transforming some national or binational projects into regional feasible projects.

Albania fully supports the priority directions that are mentioned in the Declaration on the strategic aims of the ECE. For Albania, transportation, statistics and economic snalysis, as well as environmental problems remain among priorities in the cooperation with the ECE. In this framework, we would stress a further need to identify the common projects and the necessity to include in these projects those European countries that are most needed.

Albania is willing and motivated to cooperate closely with the ECE in order to contribute to the new ECE process as well as to benefit from its activities in order to assure better national economic performances which are determinant in its way to the transatlantic and European structures.

ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЕ Г-НА В.И. ШИЛОВА, МИНИСТРА ЭКОНОМИКИ РЕСПУБЛИКИ БЕЛАРУСЬ

Сегодня Комиссия отмечает свой 50-летний юбилей. Это, безусловно, важный рубеж в жизни ЕЭК.

Будучи единственной организацией, объединившей все страны Европы после второй мировой войны, ЕЭК находилась в центре всех событий, связанных с международной напряженностью и разрядкой. Руководствуясь своими принципами, Комиссия продолжала работу в сложных условиях холодной войны и в последующий период.

Сегодня все страны - члены ЕЭК поддерживают принципы демократии и рыночной экономики. Организация, адаптируя свою деятельность к новым реалиям, продолжает успешно выполнять свои обязанности по усилению экономических связей между странами региона и остается уникальным форумом взаимодействия в экономической области всех европейских государств на равноправной основе. Высокий уровень участия в данной сессии - дополнительное свидетельство ценности Комиссии для экономической интеграции континента.

Важным является стремление ЕЭК активизировать свою деятельность по наиболее актуальным проблемам региона, что нашло отражение в подготовленном документе "План действий". Интересам всех стран - членов ЕЭК отвечало бы, как мы считаем, сохранение и наращивание общеевропейского компонента деятельности ЕЭК, в первую очередь в таких областях, как промышленность и предпринимательство, транспорт, энергетика, окружающая среда, экономический анализ.

Наша страна поддерживает положения Декларации об укреплении экономического сотрудничества в Европе. В документе нашли отражение новые реалии региона и мира в целом. Мы приветствуем стремление Комиссии в полной мере задействовать свой богатый опыт в данный исторический момент перехода стран-членов от плановой экономики к экономике рыночной.

Наша делегация с удовлетворением отмечает активные усилия ЕЭК по оказанию содействия странам с переходной экономикой. В то же время мы отчетливо видим и резервы в деле повышения эффективности деятельности Комиссии. Одним из них могло бы стать вовлечение деловых кругов в работу Комиссии. Требуется диверсификация форм и методов работы ЕЭК с учетом потребностей конкретных стран.

Так, для ряда стран с переходной экономикой злободневным является создание новых рабочих мест прежде всего за счет развития частного предпринимательства, малого и среднего бизнеса. В этой связи ЕЭК могла бы мобилизовать ресурсы и с учетом уже имеющегося опыта продолжить работу в этом направлении.

Важна помощь в области совершенствования макроэкономического анализа и прогнозирования.

Мы всячески приветствуем то, что в "Плане действий" в качестве приоритета номер один определена окружающая среда. Беларусь на себе ощутила последствия крупнейшей техногенной катастрофы. Одиннадцать лет прошло после аварии на Чернобыльской АЭС, которая стала национальной трагедией для Беларуси. Около 70% всех радионуклидов, выпавших в результате аварии, пришлось на нашу Республику. Необходим комплексный анализ сложившейся ситуации в пострадавших от аварии государствах и масштабная программа по преодолению последствий аварии на ЧАЭС. ЕЭК могла бы привлечь к ней внимание международных организаций, способных оказать помощь в решении этой экологической проблемы.

Развитие Республики Беларусь как суверенного государства, переход в экономической сфере к рыночным отношениям настоятельно требуют включения нашей страны в мирохозяйственные связи. Последнее можно эффективно осуществить лишь при учете мировых и региональных тенденций, важнейшей из которых является стремление стран мира к решению проблемы устойчивого развития на основе принципов, выработанных на Конференции ООН по окружающей среде и развитию в Рио-де-Жанейро в 1992 году.

Правительством нашей страны разработана Национальная стратегия устойчивого развития, в которой определена модель, национальные ресурсы и социально-экономический потенциал, направления, механизмы и средства осуществления устойчивого развития. Особое внимание уделено сохранению и охране окружающей среды.

16-18 апреля текущего года в Минске по инициативе правительства Беларуси при содействии Европейской экономической комиссии ООН и других международных организаций прошла Международная Конференция по устойчивому развитию стран с переходной экономикой. Она стала первым форумом, на котором министры окружающей среды и министры экономики из этих стран обсудили вопросы, представляющие общий интерес. В частности, были затронуты вопросы необходимости Национальных стратегий устойчивого развития для сбалансированного решения взаимосвязанных экономических, социальных и экологических проблем.

Пользуясь случаем, хочу поблагодарить от лица правительства нашей страны Комиссию за оказанную ею помощь в проведении этого мероприятия.

Разрешите в заключение, господин Председатель, выразить нашу убежденность в том, что ЕЭК будет и далее играть роль важного органа общеевропейского сотрудничества в торгово-экономической и научно-технической областях и в итоге всех преобразований сохранит свою роль основного звена ООН в деле оказания концентрированного содействия странам переходного периода.

DECLARATION DE MONSIEUR JAN PEETERS, SECRETAIRE D'ETAT A LA SECURITE, L'INTEGRATION SOCIAL ET L'ENVIRONNEMENT DE LA BELGIQUE

C'est pour moi un très grand honneur de prendre la parole en présence d'une aussi auguste assemblée, à l'occasion du 50ème anniversaire de la doyenne des Commissions économiques des Nations Unies, qui a été ouverte par le Secrétaire général des Nations Unies.

D'emblée, je voudrais m'associer au discours prononcé au nom de l'Union européenne par ma collègue des Pays-Bas.

Doyenne certes, mais extrêmement alerte, la CEE-ONU a prouvé et vient tout récemment encore de le démontrer en adoptant une ambitieuse réforme, qu'elle était une organisation dynamique ancrée dans le présent et apte à relever les défis du futur.

L'adoption du Plan d'action apparaît, dans le contexte actuel, comme le moyen le plus approprié d'optimaliser le potentiel et la "valeur ajoutée" de cette institution sur la scène internationale.

Ce dynamisme, que je soulignais à l'instant, est en grande partie dû aux actions conjuguées du Président de la CEE-ONU, l'Ambassadeur Willems et du Secrétaire exécutif Yves Berthelot. Je saisis cette occasion pour leur en rendre hommage; ainsi qu'aux membres du secretariat.

Les succès enregistrés par la CEE-ONU au cours de ses 50 premières années d'activité sont, je crois, salués unanimement comme des gages du renforcement du dialogue et de la cooperation pan-européenne.

Le forum d'échanges d'idées qu'est la CEE-ONU, jadis lieu unique du dialogue et de la coopération entre l'Est et l'Ouest au temps de la guerre froide, s'est mué au cours des dernières années en un puissant moteur du passage de l'économie planifiée à l'économie de marché, dans un contexte de mondialisation des échanges.

Je voudrais vous livrer ici quelques réflexions sur la mondialisation et le développement durable: Le Sommet de Rio en 1992 a consacré le concept de développement durable; intégrant les trois dimensions, économique, social et environnementale des politiques de développement, comme des éléments interdépendants et complémentaires.

Depuis lors la mondialisation s'est accélérée. Elle a sans aucun doute renforcé la croissance économique dans certains pays. Mais elle a dans le même temps aggravé les conditions économiques, sociales et environnementales dans beaucoup d'autres.

A cet égard, la CEE-ONU ne représente-t-elle pas justement un forum adéquat pour réfléchir à l'élaboration d'une forme nouvelle de coopération qui engloberait les domaines sociaux, économiques et environnementaux, permettant d'édifier au niveau du continent d'une structure plus intégrée et solidaire ?

Outre les secteurs prioritaires des transports, du développement du commerce, de l'industrie et de l'entreprise ainsi que des statistiques, la Belgique est très attachée aux travaux de la CEE-ONU dans le domaine de la protection de l'environnement. Cette question est au coeur des préoccupations de tous les citoyens et de leurs gouvernants.

Elle a des implications transfrontières considérables qui dépassent de loin la capacité des Etats à les résoudre individuellement. Dans le prolongement des grandes conférences mondiales et régionales, il est essentiel de poursuivre l'élaboration d'instruments juridiques performants. A cet égard, la Convention sur la pollution atmosphérique transfrontière à longue distance, l'adoption de règles uniformes pour le transport de merchandises dangereuses et la préparation de la prochaine conférence de Vienne sur le transport et l'environnement sont autant d'exemples concrets du rôle clé que joue la CEE-ONU et qui influencent directement la santé et la qualité de la vie des individus.

Dans ce contexte, je tiens à souligner que la Belgique attache une importance toute particulière aux travaux du groupe chargé d'élaborer un projet de convention sur "l'accès à l'information sur l'environnement et la participation du public à la prise de décision en matière d'environnement". Dans ce groupe la Belgique a présenté une proposition d'ajouter un alinéa au préambule, concernant le droit de chaque individu de vivre dans un environnement sain. Je saisis cette occasion pour remercier les nombreux pays qui ont apporté leur soutien à cette proposition.

En conclusion, Monsieur le Président, je dirais que la Belgique entend maintenir sa confiance dans cette institution qui a su par le passé prouver son efficacité comme forum de coopération régionale et s'apprête, sur des bases renouvelées, à développer ses atouts dans les pôles d'excellence que lui ont défini ses Membres et cela au bénéfice de tous et chacun d'entre eux.

STATEMENT BY MR. JADRANKO PRLIC, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

It is a great honour for me to participate at this Jubilee session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. In congratulating the 50 years of existence and activities of ECE, I would like to express our deep appreciation for what has been achieved throughout the five decades of tireless efforts to contribute to the overall economic development in Europe.

The role of the ECE began in Europe still freshly marked with the Second World War devastation and destruction and continued through all stages of its development until this very moment. In the complex field of economy, trade, communication, environment etc., ECE has given its solid contribution. On a more global level, the ECE has greatly helped cooperation and joint actions between the countries belonging to different economic and social systems. Today, the ECE has a remarkable role to play in helping the countries in transition to acquire experience and to adapt the structure and level of their economies to much higher standards.

I would also like to express our support for the Plan of Action and the Declaration of the Jubilee session. It gives a clear account of the Commission's endeavours and its valuable contribution to the development of the region and its stability. Even more so, the Declaration correctly underscores the new priorities and course of action in the times to come. The ECE should continue with the efforts to adapt to new realities and challenges of today's world. In doing so it should keep its flexibility and efficiency. We have no doubt that with 50 years of rich experience the Commission will continue to play an outstanding role in the cooperation of European countries.

Let me now, Mr. Chairman, turn to the situation in my country. As you all well know, Bosnia and Herzegovina lived in the past five years one of the unprecedented tragedies in Europe since the Second World War.

Today we can say that we are happy because after all, we have achieved, with the help of the international community, a peace. However, the consequences of the conflict aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina are enormous. Great loss in human lives was followed by thousands of injured and handicapped people, hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons. It also destroyed the economic foundations of the country as well as most of its infrastructure and communications.

Allow me, at this juncture, to quote Pope John Paul II who, during his recent visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, stated that we all have to work hard to ensure jobs as a source of normal and dignified life for human beings.

So, now, we are faced with a tremendous task of reconstruction and rebuilding of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, we have embarked on the process of establishing a free, market oriented economy. It calls for all kinds of system adjustments and the creation of a legal framework in order to create an environment for a democratic and liberal economic and social system in the country.

Having all this in mind, we believe that there is enough positive energy and skilled and determined people to start the process. Of course, it is not sufficient and it will not be possible without the continuous help and support of the international community.

Where the ECE is concerned, our first priority is to establish, as soon as possible, full participation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the various ECE activities, programmes and projects. I am particularly pleased to note, as a positive example, that at the recent meeting in Izmir, Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina was admitted in the TEM and TER projects. We are also investing efforts to adhere to all ECE instruments and to joint trade facilitation activities of the Commission, including EDIFACT. We also have a high interest in all eight priority areas of the ECE programme of work.

In that respect we can say that we see ECE as one of the most important vehicles for economic development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly in the transition process. ECE expertise and support will certainly have a positive impact and serve as a boost for moving ahead with the reconstruction activities. This will help us to deal with heavy problems of starting anew the economy and to employ our people.

In that context, I would like to use this opportunity to launch before this representative body an appeal to all countries present here today to speed up the preparation and convince without further delay the Donors Conference for Bosnia and Herzegovina. The importance of this meeting for the recovery of my country and for the success of the Peace process is crucial. Yet, permit me to remind you that what is expected from the Donors Conference represents only a fraction, but an essential one at this very point, of what has been estimated as the cost of rebuilding Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Therefore I am sure that we all agree that another postponement may create unforseeable consequences and destabilize the situation. This must not be allowed to happen because, among other things, it is connected with the IMF arrangement and creation of a positive atmosphere in the approaching negotiation with Paris and London Club concerning the rescheduling or reduction operation for more than US$ 2.8 billion of our foreign debt.

Mr. Chairman, Bosnia and Herzegovina attaches great importance to the development of various forms of regional and sub-regional cooperation.

We believe that one of the telling proofs is the actual chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the CEI (Central European Initiative) which gathers 16 countries with cca 200 million people from the region. Not only that this role brings about the reaffirmation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a sovereign State and accepted partner. It also serves as a catalyst for increased cooperation with some of the most important European institutions such as EU, OSCE, EBRD, WB etc.

Bosnia and Herzegovina also actively participates on a project basis in another, recently promoted regional initiative in which ECE know-how and support plays an instrumental role. We are talking of SECI (Southeast European Cooperative Initiative) which is focused on economic cooperation and concrete joint projects between the interested countries in the region. As well as the other participating counties, we received with satisfaction the latest assurances which cleared SECI from certain unacceptable political connotations.

My country was particularly pleased with the decision of the SECI Agenda Committee which designated Bosnia and Herzegovina as a host country of the project group meetings entitled: Interconnection of natural gas networks, diversification of gas supply and improvement of security of supply in southeast Europe.

The overall role of the ECE in similar projects is the best confirmation of its position as an unavoidable factor in the development and prosperity of, for the first time in history, an undivided European continent.

Let me conclude by once again wishing a long and prosperous life to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, to the benefit of all of us.

STATEMENT BY MR. VALENTIN DOBREV, FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF BULGARIA

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the Jubilee Fiftieth Anniversary Session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

I should like to extend to you, Mr. Chairman, my sincere congratulations on your election and to express my confidence that under your guidance this session will achieve success.

My Delegation commends the Bureau of the Commission, the Executive Secretary and the staff of the ECE secretariat for their excellence in preparation for the Jubilee Session.

For fifty years ECE has served as a respected, competent and effective forum for regional economic cooperation. In its dual role as a regional commission of the United Nations and a European institution, ECE successfully initiated and facilitated concerted actions for raising the level of European economic activity and for maintaining and strengthening the economic relations of the European countries, both among themselves and with other countries of the world.

Bulgaria has taken part in and, according to its potential, has contributed to the increased scope and intensity of the Commission's work over the past decades. My county has benefitted substantially from its participation in ECE bodies and operational activities. On behalf of the Bulgarian Government, I wish to express warmest gratitude to the staff of the Commission, including the retired ECE officials, for their dedication and sustained efforts towards promoting and strengthening regional economic cooperation.

At the present Jubilee Session of ECE we assess the achievements of the Commission and its impact on the multilateral economic relations in Europe over the past period, not only for the sake of the assessment itself, but rather to reveal, outline and approve new priorities and strategic orientation of the economic coherence and integration under the remarkable changes in the region at the edge of the new century. The unprecedented historic developments - among them, the impressive economic vitality and performance of the West European integration and the adherence to the values of democracy and the market economy, proclaimed by the Central and East European Countries, have required substantiable evolution in the forms and methods of ECE activities.

The Bulgarian Government highly appreciates the outcome of the negotiations on the reform package in the Commission, which has been reflected in the Declaration on the Strengthening of Economic Cooperation in Europe and in the Plan of Action. The implementation of the reform measures will streamline and strengthen the activities of the Commission, will further assist the countries in Central and Eastern Europe in their transition to market economy and will introduce a more homogenous, transparent and cost-effective intergovernmental structure of ECE. That will constitute a valuable contribution of the Commission to the programme of profound administrative changes for the United Nations, the

main features of which were announced on 17 March 1997 in New York by UN Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan. It is our understanding that there shall not be a stand-still in the ECE reform efforts after the Jubilee Session and the Commission will further adapt its activities to the developments in the world and regional economy and to the requirements of its member States.

The accelerated and parallel integration in the European and Euro-Atlantic Structures, with a view to subsequent membership in the European Union and NATO, is a priority of the Bulgarian foreign policy. Bulgaria strictly fulfils its obligations under the Association Agreement with the European Union. My Government expects that soon after the successful conclusion of the EU Intergovernmental Conference in Torino, Bulgaria will be in a position to commence, simultaneously with the other associated countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the negotiations on its accession to the European Union.

Inspired by the European perspective was the initiative of the Bulgarian Government to launch a new process of multilateral cooperation among countries of South-Eastern Europe. The Sofia Declaration on Good-Neighbourly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation, adopted on 7 July 1996 by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the South-East European countries, contains the main directions of a comprehensive process of multilateral subregional cooperation in the various areas. The Bulgarian Government welcomes the Royaumont process, launched by the European Union and the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative of the United States of America and considers the different initiatives for cooperation in South-Eastern Europe as mutually reinforcing.

We are confident that the participation of ECE through a wide range of coordination and assistance activities will facilitate the accomplishment of the initiatives' objectives.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my appreciation of the achieved prioritization of the ECE work and its further adaptation to the prevailing needs of the member States. I wish to emphasize my hope that the forthcoming extensive reform in the United Nations system will not result in diminishing the role of ECE, which is a very useful and irreplaceable instrument, faithfully serving all countries in the region.

STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR JOHN WEEKES, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT GENEVA

Over the last 50 years, the ECE executed its mandate against an initial backdrop of a post-war, politically divided Europe undergoing reconstruction, to the present, exciting period, personified by a European region increasingly united in the shared beliefs of liberal, market economies and open, pluralistic democracies. The ECE has played an important role in the economic development of Europe and indeed beyond. Much of this contribution has been through its work in harmonization and standard setting.

With the approaching milestone of its Jubilee, the ECE appropriately undertook a major reform exercise. Canada is a strong supporter of the movement to reform international organizations and agencies, in order for their work to better reflect core mandates and comparative advantage. Implicit in this reform are the principles of efficiency gains and resource savings. We are therefore particularly pleased with the ECE's reform exercise, both with respect to process and results.

With respect to process, the exhaustive questionnaire of the membership, followed by the "case-study" approach to its review, has resulted in our governments having increased, detailed knowledge of all ECE activities. As an organization, the ECE has benefitted from a clear expression of how members collectively assess which activities were of greatest value and which were of least value to them. This year, the ECOSOC will review progress in the reform efforts of the regional commissions. Canada believes that the ECE reform process heightens the credibility of the ECE in the review, and provides a useful model for the ECOSOC review process, notwithstanding the unique aspects of the ECE's work.

The results of the reform are equally laudable. Under the Chair's strong leadership, and the equally important support from the secretariat and Members, the Commission has succeeded in sharpening its focus on areas where members valued the work and agreed that the ECE possessed comparative value. Efficiency gains and resource savings will undoubtedly follow. Canada was pleasantly surprised by the high level of convergence of views among members.

To illustrate, while neither we nor any member saw all of our views carry the day in the reform exercise, our priorities - environment, standard setting, trade facilitation, timber, and statistics - were also priorities of the members in general. Indeed, these activities reflect areas where the ECE has arguably a global leadership role.

Like all members, Canada supports the ECE in its efforts to assist the Central and East European economies in their transition. We were pleased that the transition economies preferred that resources be dedicated to individual work areas of particular interest to them rather than a special "countries in transition" unit. This is a clear indication of the degree to which mainstream ECE activities can facilitate further economic integration between transition and other economies of the region.

The challenge for us as Members is to support fully the Bureau and secretariat in implementation of the Plan of Action and resist the inevitable temptations within our bureaucracies to advocate specific interests. A more strategic challenge is to ensure that the Group of Experts on the Programme of Work carries out its role in a manner that continues the reform processes emphasis on concentration on where the Commission can provide value-added.

In this regard, we welcome the secretariat's note on the timing and frequency of the "annual" meeting. Given the experience of other regional commissions with respect to biennialization and given the secretariat's frank assessment of the resources involved, biennialization appears a pragmatic and useful move, one which will free the secretariat to further attend to the needs of the member States. We are less convinced by the reluctance of the secretariat with respect to shifting the timing of the meeting. If there is consensus on biennialization, we would advocate its adoption and, given upcoming ECOSOC deliberations, defer a decision on timing pending those discussions.

The Group of Experts on the Programme of Work has the potential to provide the ECE with a dynamic of constant reform and renewal through regular consultation and harmonization between the various ECE elements and the members. Canada strongly advocated this consultation process and we will watch with keen interest its developments over the next several years. A successful Group of Experts on the Programme of Work assures a flexible, efficient and responsive ECE.

As Members will recall, Canada expressed serious concerns regarding the utility of the economic analysis function of the Commission. The consensus achieved in the Plan of Action represents a considerable shift for the Commission, and we look forward to assessing the revised format of the Survey in the coming year. Needless to say, we should ensure that the annual seminar remains an informal mechanism rather than "creeping" back as the Senior Economic Advisers.

In conclusion, Canada wishes to express its pleasure and to congratulate Ambassador Willems, other members of the ECE bureau, the Executive Secretary, the ECE secretariat and ECE members for an effective and credible reform exercise. This reform, and the ongoing commitment to "continuous improvement" provided by the Group of Experts, demonstrate the vitality and continued relevance of the ECE, one which assures a dynamic ECE as it begins its second half century.

STATEMENT BY MRS SPOMENKA CEK, ASSISTANT MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

The Republic of Croatia is pleased to participate in this Jubilee Session and to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Economic Commission for Europe. We wish to express our congratulations to you, Mr. Chairman, to the Executive Secretary, Mr. Berthelot, the Deputy Executive Secretary, Mrs. Pastizzi Ferencic and the entire Commission's staff on this significant jubilee and to express our particular appreciation for their dedication and results achieved over the past years.

In circumstances of great political, economic, social and environmental changes worldwide and, in particular, in our region, Croatia wishes to emphasize the importance of the ongoing reform of the Economic Commission for Europe, as part of the global reform of the United Nations system. We hope that the reform will enable the Commission to respond more adequately to emerging needs and requirements of its member States.

In this context, we welcome a new structure of the Commission and the secretariat's reorganization, as well as the proposed Plan of Action. Bearing in mind that a number of the Commission's programmes and activities are designed for the needs of countries in transition, Croatia, which belongs to that group, supports that approach. At the same time, we hope that special assistance and concrete programmes will be offered for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Republic of Croatia as a war-affected country.

During the last year and at the beginning of this year, significant political developments have occurred in Croatia. The most important achievements are the finalization of the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium into Croatia and the holding of free elections throughout the whole territory of the Republic of Croatia.

The Croatian Government continues to stabilize economic conditions in the country and to secure the transition to a market economy. The annual inflation in 1996 was 3.4% which is one of the lowest rates among the countries in transition. The exchange rate remained stable against the German Mark. Interest rates begin to decline, reflecting the low rate of inflation, continued monetary and fiscal discipline, and the successful bank rehabilitation. The current growth of the GDP is foreseen to speed up to 7.8%, giving an expected annual growth rate of about 6.3% in 1997. Growth projections point to an average real rate of 6% for the next few years.

The current account balance is the reflection of the Croatian external position - a small and open economy. The deficit in the trade balance is the consequence of the post-war recovery of the economy and the exchange rate policy. It is expected that surplus, in the trade balance, which can be achieved by more intensive export of goods and services and in particular by the growth of tourism, will take some time. Presently, the major trade partners of Croatia are European countries, mostly countries of the European Union and some of our neighbouring countries. Thus we are very interested in economic cooperation with the countries from the ECE region.

Taking into account the economic stabilization and peaceful outlook, as well as one of our main objectives, i.e. the reconstruction of the country and, in particular, the rebuilding and upgrading of the infrastructure, we believe that Croatia has become an even more attractive destination for foreign investors.

In our view, the restructured Commission should give considerable attention to cooperation with OSCE, subregional groupings, Mediterranean cooperation, all of which has already been endorsed. We are of the opinion that the Commission should devote more time and efforts to promoting cooperation and joint programmes with other bodies of the UN system, with the European Union, OECD and others, and to be an advocate of regional aspirations and requirements of those member States which are not members or active in some of those institutions and organizations.

We are pleased that most of the mentioned objectives are contained in the proposed Plan of Action, which Croatia strongly supports. We wish to stress again the importance of avoiding duplication of activities with the other regional organizations and institutions, which must be one of the main principles in relations of the ECE with other bodies.

Regarding the future work areas of the Commission, we would like to support its efforts to concentrate available resources and activities in sectors where the Commission has achieved consolidated results and has comparative advantages. In this context, Croatia attaches great importance to the transport sector in the Region. The work in this sector is a valuable means for solving problems in transport such as border crossing facilitation and transport infrastructure, as well as the problems caused by transport, such as in the fields of safety and environment.

The work of the Commission on environment protection is another high priority area, where the ECE contribution would be most welcome, because damage to our environment constitutes a threat to the entire planet. We are happy that Croatia was a host country to the Joint ECE and FAO workshop on water pollution and protection in agricultural practice, which was held in Zagreb, from 20 to 24 May last year.

The energy sector and its activities are considered by Croatia as a very important segment of the Commission's activities. We sincerely hope that the projects on energy efficiency, market adaptation of the energy economies and national policies in central and eastern Europe, work in the field of gas and other projects within the Committee on Sustainable Energy will further promote the Commission's activities in this field.

Aware of the crucial role of the business community in supporting necessary changes in the countries in transition, we welcome the intentions of the Commission to gradually strengthen its relationships with the business community, and to involve it in the ECE sectors such as trade, industry, energy, infrastructure and others.

Although the other activities of the Commission are of great importance, I have focused attention on the merits of continuous and pragmatic work of the Economic Commission for Europe which makes such a significant contribution to economic and technical cooperation in the region.

Allow me to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by affirming that the Republic of Croatia continues to attach great importance to the Economic Commission for Europe as a part of the United Nations, with its European and Transatlantic character, and as a forum for regional cooperation. In that spirit, I am confident that this Jubilee Session will pave the way for positive developments in the future work of the Economic Commission for Europe, thus contributing to all member countries.

STATEMENT BY MR. ALECOS SHAMBOS, PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS

The promised world of peace and security, the world of social and economic development, as enshrined in the UN Charter, which was dreamed of by mankind after the end of World War II, was to remain for long a vision overshadowed by the divide of cold war, as foretold in his ingenuity and eloquence by Winston Churchill in his monumental "iron curtain speech" in 1945.

A new climate of fear, mistrust and pessimism for the future of mankind was to plunge Europe in particular and the rest of the world in general into an all out political, social and economic schism between East and West.

In the context of this socio-political situation, a United Nations Forum for economic cooperation emerged in 1947, aiming to facilitate the rapprochement between the two antagonistic blocs, namely the Economic Commission for Europe. This Commission was the only European body during the Cold War where the States of Western and Eastern Europe met on a regular basis to discuss important economic and social issues.

By the end of the Cold War, however, the many revolutionary events that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe defined a new role for the ECE: that of contributing to the creation of a "new Europe".

In order to meet the above goal the ECE has been confronting perhaps the greatest challenge in its 50-year history, namely the integration of the new member countries of Eastern and Central Europe with the economically advanced ones of the western part of the continent. More than half of the Commission's members are now countries in transition with specific needs and varying priorities. The ECE is called upon to address old and new challenges facing today's societies, such as unemployment, violence, drug abuse, poverty, mass scale migration, environmental degradation, etc.

We praise the Commission's endeavours to revise and reconstruct its work programme, and more specifically the efforts undertaken by the ad hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency, in collaboration with the secretariat, to identify those fields in which the ECE needs to concentrate in order to reduce disparities in the level of development of its member countries and to strengthen the integration of the region.

At this point it is, I believe, important to mention that in the framework of the restructuring of the UN System, the reform already achieved by the ECE stands as an example for emulation.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Executive Secretary, Mr. Yves Berthelot, for his constant efforts in guiding our Commission.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Commission's stance towards the Mediterranean region, via the ECE's "Mediterranean mandate". The objective of the aforementioned mandate is clear: to see a prosperous and peaceful Mediterranean region working together for economic integration and social development. Standing along with other activities like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the ECE Mediterranean mandate has the potential of contributing to the evolution of peace in this sensitive area.

Consistent with its traditional role as a bridge, Cyprus has been an active participant in the above "initiative". In this respect Cyprus has decided to organize economic seminars on the island with the participation of countries from Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans and Northern Africa. We are currently preparing for a follow-up seminar to the very successful one organized in Nicosia in 1993 by the Cyprus Organization for Standards and Control of Quality, in cooperation with the ECE, focusing specifically on quality assurance and metrology.

Cyprus is also ready to share its experience and expertise in other areas where, in spite of the consequences of foreign aggression and continuing occupation, it has emerged as a successful case study in development.

In its 50-year history, this Commission has undoubtedly survived many European turmoils by showing remarkable commitment in addressing various socio-economic problems.

On the eve of the third millennium, the ECE's mission has been reinforced. Europe is still facing challenges that demand determined action. As we mark today the Commission's Jubilee anniversary we renew our commitment to redouble our efforts in seeking solutions and meeting these challenges for the benefit of our peoples. Our task is not an easy one. Judging, however, from our performance so far, there emerge, I believe, better prospects for more progress and higher achievements.

STATEMENT BY MR. CYRIL SVOBODA, DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

On behalf of the Government of the Czech Republic, I have the honour to extend my special thanks to all the people who have organized today's meeting, first of all to the Chairman of the Bureau, Ambassador Lodewijk Willems and the Executive Secretary.

We meet to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, taking into consideration the fact that ECE has been in existence for fifty years, the fifty years of European profound transition. Europe looked very different in 1947, the year of ECE inception. ECE came into existence when some countries, like my country, were put aside while post-war Europe was progressing with European integration and transatlantic cooperation.

At that painful time ECE was an effective forum where all countries regardless of their political orientation could participate in discussion and the decision-making process in many fields of economic and technical cooperation. ECE has played in this manner an unprecedented historical role. I am convinced that ECE, in stressing liberalization of the economy, promoting the principles of the market economy and the principles of democracy, has contributed to the end of the communist totalitarianism in Europe.

Europe has changed since 1947, so has ECE. It was not automatic and smooth, sometimes the process of change was painful for both, for Europe as well as for ECE. Luckily, both of them have always tended to survive together helping each other in difficult moments of life. And here we are, of many spheres of its day-to-day functioning.

Many inhabitants of Europe do not suspect that the picture of their contemporary continent is to a great extent influenced by ECE work. They drive their cars built according to the same standards, they are looking forward towards amelioration of the environment as a result of International Conventions, etc. But we, the representatives of the member States, have to admit, the ECE has yielded tangible results.

Desiring greater credibility, flexibility and efficiency, today's ECE faces new challenges: budgetary constraints, the reorientation of targets, and the reform of its working methods on the one hand and enhanced cooperation with other bodies, namely the Council of Europe, the European Union, OSCE and OECD on the other.

From the Czech Republic's point of view the ECE closely belongs to the architecture of European institutions. It has proved to be reformable, flexible, effective and efficient.

However I am not going to underestimate or to over evaluate ECE capacities, capabilities and aspirations. I am convinced the Declaration and Plan of Action are capable of giving fresh impetus for ECE to be able to take up the challenges at the dawn of the 21st century as an effective force for economic integration.

STATEMENT BY MR. JAAK LEIMANN, MINISTER OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address this forum at its Jubilee Session. Let me use this opportunity to wish us all a constructive atmosphere and cooperation spirit in order to ensure that these days will provide us all with new ideas and guidelines in the never-ending task to make this continent a better place to live.

The importance of economic cooperation in Europe is a subject that cannot be underestimated when we aim to achieve this task. The work of the Economic Commission for Europe, especially in this stage of reform, plays an important role in this process.

Strengthening economic cooperation in Europe is something that needs to be addressed and emphasized and I am glad that a relevant declaration has been prepared that will underline its significance. However, we must ensure that the ideas expressed therein will also be put into life via concrete deeds.

Estonia welcomes different regional initiatives in Europe that are targeted at securing economic and sustainable development. In this context, I am glad to say that the economic cooperation among the Baltic countries and among the countries on the shores of the Baltic Sea can be a good example of how regional activities result in better understanding between different States and improving their well-being.

During their five years history, both these initiatives have provided remarkable results via significantly increased trade and investment flows, as well as technology and know-how transfer. Sometimes I have a feeling that they deserve far wider attention beyond the borders of this region. They can be taken as an example of a well-functioning model, even in spite of the fact that a lot still needs to be done in this region to enhance trade and economic cooperation in the wider sense.

Estonia's objective in its economic policy has always been the encouragement of competition and entrepreneurial spirit through a liberal and non-discriminative trade regime and openness regarding foreign investment and foreign exchange. This has been achieved by a number of free trade agreements and conservative domestic monetary and banking regulations. Implementing these policies and participating in various cooperation programmes, Estonia has gained a position where we can declare our readiness to take more responsibility in securing the same results in reform policies elsewhere.

We believe that learning by doing and "trade not aid" are the best ways to transform national economy from a command-based system to democracy and free markets. We are ready to share our experience in this field, whether it is privatization or restructuring national economy in a broader field. This message is addressed to all counties represented here.

Another area of work of the ECE, which is closely related to economic growth and well-being, is environment. Therefore, we consider it extremely important to ensure that while implementing, both reforms and cooperation in wider sense, due attention is paid to sustainable development.

Estonia shares the views expressed in UN General Assembly resolution 50/96 and considers it to be of a substantial importance in eliminating economy coercive measures against developing countries. Furthermore, Estonia holds the view that in moving towards a non-discriminative worldwide trading system much more could be done in respect of developing countries.

Estonia supports the proposals of the European Union for Reform of the United Nations System in the Economic and Social Areas. We especially welcome proposals that foresee the elimination of duplicated activities by different UN bodies. Therefore, a full review of the functions and mandates of the Agencies is needed. We also hope for closer cooperation between UN agencies, the international financial institutions and the WTO.

May I take this opportunity to wish us all the courage and effort it takes to solve the tasks that face us. In conclusion I would like to express to this body good luck for a further 50 years to serve its member countries in the best possible way.

MESSAGE DE S.E. M. LE MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES DE LA FRANCE LU PAR M. L'AMBASSADEUR DANIEL BERNARD, REPRESENTANT PERMANENT DE LA FRANCE

J'ai tenu aujourd'hui à manifester l'attachement de la France aux réalisations de la Commission économique pour l'Europe des Nations Unies à l'occasion de son 50ème anniversaire.

La France entend également renouveler, à cette occasion, sa confiance dans l'aptitude de la Commission à s'adapter avec souplesse et dynamisme aux enjeux considérables auxquelles elle doit faire face, avec ambition et réalisme, à l'aube du XXIème siècle.

En effet, les tâches multiples que la Commission s'est fixées depuis sa création n'ont, pour la plupart, rien perdu de leur actualité et de leur pertinence. Sa vocation première, qui fut de promouvoir la coopération économique entre les pays membres, revêt toujours la même urgence depuis que la division artificielle entre les deux parties de l'Europe a cédé la place à une période de rapprochement progressif mais irréversible des Etats et des peuples qui la composent.

La Commission économique pour l'Europe est la preuve tangible qu'une aspiration unanime à partager des valeurs communes et à tisser des liens économiques étroits, lorsqu'elle trouve à s'exprimer au sein d'une organisation universelle comme les Nations Unies, peut transcender les clivages idéologiques et politiques et contribuer à combler les fractures économiques et culturelles, perçues comme autant d'entraves injustes à la prospérité et à la dignité de tous les Etats.

Il ne fait aucun doute que, dans le contexte actuel de concurrence accrue entre les organisations économiques internationales, qui cherchent toutes une réponse adaptée au défi majeur de la mondialisation, la Commission économique pour l'Europe des Nations Unies a favorisé, dans ses domaines de competence propres, le rapprochement ineluctable de ses pays membres, suscité la solidarité, provoqué l'harmonisation des techniques et des réglementations dans des secteurs vitaux de l'économie, développé une interdépendance étroite qui limite les risques de fragmentation géopolitique, de marginalisation économique et la tentation du repli sur soi.

Ces acquis considérables confèrent à la Commission des avantages comparatifs reconnus.

Cependant, la France considère qu'en insufflant un nouveau dynamisme à son action, en se coordonnant mieux encore avec les autres organisations, la Commission est à même de donner la pleine mesure de ses capacités dans l'établissement de relations économiques harmonieuses entre tous ses Etats membres et dans leur intégration coordonnée dans un système fondé sur l'économie de marché et la démocratie.

C'est pourquoi la France se réjouit que la restructuration des activités de la Commission, patiemment et sagement élaborée après dix-huit mois d'une réflexion intense, à laquelle la France s'est toujours efforcée d'apporter une contribution active, traduisent avec vigueur et clarté une volonté de réforme concrète et pragmatique.

La France souhaite, ainsi que l'a rappelé Madame le Ministre des Pays-Bas au nom de l'Union européenne, une mise en oeuvre rapide de cette réforme et une évaluation régulière de ses effets.

Elle ne doute pas que cette réforme, fondée sur une concentration des moyens, une rationalisation des activités et un souci constant d'éviter les doubles emplois, apporte ainsi une contribution décisive à l'entreprise de rénovation et de revitalisation des activités économiques et sociales de l'ensemble du système des Nations Unies, et notamment des autres Commissions économiques régionales.

La Commission économique pour l'Europe a su, par son appartenance aux Nations Unies et par son caractère à la fois européen et transatlantique, se faire reconnaître une réelle expertise par des pays qui appartiennent également à d'autres commissions économiques regionales et qui n'ont pas forcément vocation à intégrer, du moins pour le moment, d'autres organisations économiques européennes. Elle a également accru, en associant étroitement à ses divers travaux des Etats d'autres continents, la légitimité de sa compétence économique et technique et est devenue un pôle d'excellence reconnu au-delà de ses frontières.

Cet avantage incontestable doit être maximisé dans des secteurs primordiaux susceptibles de recueillir l'adhésion de tous les pays et de contribuer concrètement à l'amélioration de leur prospérité.

Ainsi, par-delà de sa fonction de forum démocratique propre à l'échange des expériences et à la comparaison des politiques nationales, la Commission économique pour l'Europe peut demeurer le lieu où se concrétise la convergence des politiques économiques et des réglementations techniques.

C'est pourquoi la France souscrit pleinement à la definition des priorités stratégiques du nouveau plan d'action adopté à la présente session, et qui, sans rompre avec les acquis antérieurs, n'en inaugure pas moins des domaines nouveaux et des méthodes de travail plus souples, ainsi que des modalités renovées de coopération avec les autres institutions internationales.

La mise en oeuvre de ces objectifs réalistes et pratiques suppose qu'une attention particulière soit portée, dans un esprit de dialogue et d'assistance mutuelle, à une évaluation régulière et objective des besoins réels des Etats membres et notamment des pays à économies en transition. Mon pays se félicite de la création d'une unité spécialement créée à cet effet pour donner une traduction concrète à ces demandes spécifiques, dans la limite des ressources existantes, et pour autant qu'elle n'aboutisse pas à réintroduire des activités que la plupart des pays ont jugées obsolètes.

De même, la France se réjouit que le développement du commerce réserve une place légitime à la promotion de l'investissement et de l'entreprise et au resserrement des liens avec le secteur privé et la société civile, dans le respect des procédures en vigueur aux Nations Unies.

La France a toujours pour sa part participé activement, et souvent à des niveaux importants de responsabilité, à de nombreuses activités de la Commission, dans le souci constant de faire bénéficier de son expertise les organes de la Commission et les pays membres, en étroit cooperation avec ses partenaires de l'Union européenne.

C'est la raison pour laquelle je tiens à vous assurer, au moment où la Commission célèbre son 50ème anniversaire, de la disponibilité de la France à oeuvrer activement au succès de cette entreprise stimulante de renforcement de la coopération économique dans la région.

STATEMENT BY MR. MICHAEL UKLEBAR FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA

Allow me on behalf of the Government of Georgia to join other speakers and cordially congratulate the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on its 50th anniversary jubilee session. In doing so, I would like to point out that 50 years is rather a considerable period of time for activities of any international organization. Throughout this period, ECE has proved its viability, and good evidence of this is the result of the work carried out by this organization to this day.

After the collapse of the former socialist camp and the end of confrontation, it seemed that a new era of universal revival and development was coming. However, such estimates turned out to be premature. Experience shows that side by side with positive changes in the world, the evil legacy of the past is still strong. Moreover, alongside with old and new dangerous challenges to the contemporary world have emerged: aggressive separatism and nationalism, territorial expansion, and hotbeds of tension have taken shape within a number of countries owing to economic recession. Considering the developing picture of the world, a conclusion was drawn that it is necessary to overcome an additional stage in the history of humanity, the so-called "transition period", to build a community of free and democratic States without crises and conflicts.

Will the world community be able to achieve the objectives of the transition period? Will our generation witness the advent of the era of global peace and economic prosperity? Admittedly, it is commonly recognized that it is especially important that such international organizations as the United Nations, OSCE and others, be made more effective and functional to develop structures to overcome crises, promote the development of processes of positive changes.

Taking into account the realities of the contemporary world we should not stop at what has been accomplished. On the contrary, it is necessary to engage qualitatively new factors and mechanisms with the purpose of giving ECE a worthy place in the evolutionary process of all-European cooperation. In this connection, let me share with you some observations which, to my mind, would contribute to the enhancement of the efficiency of ECE's work at the present stage:

First: We consider the problems of the transition countries among the primary tasks of ECE. Indeed, in view of the fact that ECE is an international organization competent in issues of economic development of the transition countries, it would be expedient to strengthen its work in rendering assistance in the elaboration of concrete projects and programmes envisaging mobilization of external resources for needs of the mentioned group of countries. Working out of problems of attracting foreign investments into concrete transition countries would contribute to this work. In this connection, practical recommendations of the Commission must play an important role.

Second: ECE is meant to initiate discussion of the issues of bringing the transition countries into the world economic system and giving impetus to this process. In this respect, it would be efficient to focus our attention, efforts and means on the issues of regional integration.

In this connection, it should be mentioned that within the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), in which Georgia takes an active part, certain results were achieved in many fields of cooperation and more attention is paid to further development of relations in such spheres as transport, energy, banking, communications, environmental protection, etc. We are convinced that such a kind of approach within the framework of the BSEC integration will facilitate the establishment of direct contacts among the economic entities of the BSEC and attraction of private investments from other regions.

Deepening of economic intercommunications within various European regional associations requires a flexible approach to the integration processes, taking into consideration initiatives of certain countries for a closer economic cooperation. In this context, the Transcaucasian region, being the south-eastern part of Europe, objectively must take a worthy place in the development of the all-European economic area. Georgia attaches great importance to the rehabilitation and development of economic ties among the three Transcaucasian countries. It is worth noting that the Government of Georgia, together with the Governments of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), European Commission (EC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is organizing the Conference "Transcaucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia: Prospects of Economic Cooperation", to be held in Tbilisi on 29-30 May 1997, with the aim of determining possible ways of rehabilitation of the lost contacts and establishing new economic links, taking into account the existing situation in the region. In this context, ECE should concentrate its efforts on harmonizing the functioning of the existing regional and subregional structures.

Third: As is known, the transport issue is a priority among the activities of ECE. The same problem is a priority one for many countries with transition economies, especially for Georgia, which at this stage is considered as a possible transport corridor in the Europe-Asia exchange. Many projects exist within the framework of the Commission in the mentioned field. However, it seems to be more reasonable to concentrate on the most priority ones in the context of current developments, while looking for donors and sources of finance.

In this connection, I would like to mention the TRACECA-BSEC Conference of the Ministers of Transport (17 countries) held in Tbilisi on 8-9 April 1997. During this conference particular attention was given to the issue of linking of transport corridors related to the Caucasian, Central Asian and Black Sea region. The problems of development of regional transport networks in the context of All-European cooperation and preparation of the Third Pan-European conference which will be held in Helsinki on 23-25 June 1997 were also considered. The necessity of the joining of the countries participants of the Conference to the UN/ECE international transport agreements and conventions was expressed.

Fourth: To our belief, the institute of Regional Advisers is an important constituent of ECE providing the possibility of a dynamic response of the Commission to the most topical problems of the countries with a transition economy. The experience of Georgia - first of the countries in which the conception of focused consultative assistance of the Regional Advisers has been applied - is testimony to the significant possibilities of this programme. Therefore, the direction of this activity should be supported with adequate resources so that the contacts between the nations in need and the Advisers be frequent and thorough as the scope of efficient consultative assistance stipulates.

Fifth: We are deeply convinced that the most important factor in terms of coordination is the establishment of strategic partnership relations between ECE and international economic, financial, regional and other organizations engaged in ECE-related issues of development of the countries in transition.

In this connection, avoiding overlapping is crucial, which means a detailed analysis of the planned work by a given organization in the given situation of a recipient country.

The jubilee spirit of the present ECE session lays ground for optimism for the future; here, once again, we are convinced that however complex the challenges facing Europe, our determination to meet them prevails.

DECLARATION DE MADAME PATRIZIA TOAI, SOUS-SECRETAIRE D'ETAT AUX AFFAIRES ETRANGERES D'ITALIE

Je voudrais dire tout d'abord que mon pays partage pleinement les positions énoncées par la Présidence néerlandaise de l'Union Européenne.

Je remercie, ensuite, le Secrétaire général des Nations Unies, M. Kofi Annan, pour sa présence à cette session du Cinquantième anniversaire de la Commission économique pour l'Europe, qui est une indication de l'importance de cette commission régionale au sein du système des Nations Unies. De meme je remercie le secrétaire exécutif, M. Yves Berthelot, pour son action constructive et cohérente qui a clairement contribué à la bonne réussite du processus de restructuration qui a caractérisé les activités de la Commission à partir de la session de l'année dernière.

Nos remerciements et notre appréciation doivent également être adressés au secrétariat pour le travail qu'il a accompli malgré les incertitudes budgétaires et la réduction du personnel. Efficace et remarquable a été le travail des principaux organes subsidiaires et des groupes de travail. Une mention particulière doit être réservée au rôle qu'a eu le Bureau dans la réforme et, en particulier, son Président l'Ambassadeur Willems: leurs efforts et leur persévérance dans les négociations ont mené à la definition du Plan d'action et de la Déclaration qui constitueront le point de référence pour la stratégie future de la Commission économique pour l'Europe du vingt-et-unième siècle.

L'Italie a toujours considéré la CEE comme un forum de dialogue, visant à une meilleure compréhension réciproque et à la réalisation d'orientations ou politiques communes, et en même temps comme un forum de négociation d'accords visant à l'harmonisation des politiques et des pratiques de ses pays membres. Cette harmonisation facilite, entre autre, les échanges économiques et les investissements, l'intégration des réseaux de transport et rend plus efficace la protection de l'environnement. Dans les cinquante ans de sa vie la CEE et ses pays membres ont beaucoup changé. La Commission a toujours été en mesure de saisir l'évolution des conditions politiques et économiques qui est intervenue. La réforme de 1990 et le nouveau Plan d'action en sont deux indications concrètes.

L'Italie désire, d'autre part, exprimer sa satisfaction pour le résultat de la réforme obtenu par le groupe d'experts, le Bureau de la CEE et le secrétariat. Nous souhaitons que cette réforme puisse donner encore plus d'efficacité à l'action de la CEE; et qu'elle puisse aussi constituer un point de répère pour la restructuration d'autres commissions régionales et d'autres organismes similaires des Nations Unies. Je voudrais souligner surtout la bonté de la méthode appliquée pour la réalisation de cette réforme. Les experts ont effectué une analyse profonde des activités et des priorités pour décider sur qu'elles activités il fallait concentrer les ressources de la Commission. Dans un contexte de ressources stables ou, dans certains cas, en diminution, il est essential de faire des choix, même si parfois il s'agit de choix difficiles. Nous savons bien, d'ailleurs, que ce phénomène n'est pas limité aux organisations internationales, puisqu'il concerne aussi les pays qui en sont les membres. Mais je pense, malgré tout, que la philosophie de la réforme, "faire mieux ce que la Commission faisait bien", a été pleinement respectée, tout en tenant compte des besoins de tous les Etats intéressés.

Les débats pour la restructuration ont été d'une grande franchise, mais toujours ouverts et constructifs. Ils ont montré l'engagement des Etats membres pour élaborer une nouvelle stratégie. Il est très important que tous les pays membres aient contribué activement à la definition et à l'exécution du Plan d'action: leur responsabilité est maintenant de faire en sorte que cette restructuration soit un succès.

Je voudrais aussi exprimer mon appréciation pour le nouveau format de la Session Annuelle qui me semble un bon exemple de rationalisation des activités institutionnelles qui permettra de mieux utiliser les ressources limités de l'organisation et des Etats membres. Dans cette ligne de tendance positive il faut aussi mentionner les efforts de la Commission pour utiliser au mieux les moyens modernes de l'informatique pour une ample diffusion de l'information sur ses activités. Il s'agit là d'un autre signe de la capacité de la Commission à s'adapter aux temps qui changent.

Le cinquantième anniversaire de la Commission économique pour l'Europe doit être non seulement une occasion pour célébrer les résultats achevés dans la passé, mais aussi et surtout une étape qui confirme le rôle et l'importance de cet organisme dans le contexte régional.

Soyez convaincu, Monsieur le Président, que l'Italie est engagée à réaliser les objectifs de la réforme et qu'elle continuera à participer activement à toutes les activités de la Commission ainsi qu'au renforcement ultérieur de son rôle dans le but de promouvoir la collaboration économique au niveau régional, qui est une condition nécessaire pour un développement constructif dans un contexte de confiance mutuelle et de stabilité.

ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЕ ПОСЛА Б.Д. УТЕМУРАТОВА, ПОСТОЯННОГО ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЯ РЕСПУБЛИКИ КАЗАХСТАН ПРИ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ В ЖЕНЕВЕ

Позвольте мне прежде всего выразить глубокое удовлетворение в связи с Вашей деятельностью на посту Председателя и пожелать Вам, а также всем членам президиума успехов в руководстве работой настоящей сессии.

В эти дни Комиссия отмечает свой 50-летний юбилей. Это важный рубеж в жизни ЕЭК, когда она не только подводит итоги полувековой деятельности, оценивает свой вклад в общеевропейское строительство, но и определяет свою будущую роль и место в развитии экономического сотрудничества в регионе. Комиссия остается уникальным форумом взаимодействия в экономической области европейских и центральноазиатских государств на равноправной основе. Высокий уровень участия в данной сессии, прежде всего стран СНГ, Центральной и Восточной Европы - дополнительное свидетельство ценности Комиссии для экономической интеграции континента.

Одним из важнейших итогов юбилейной сессии станет принятие Декларации об укреплении экономического сотрудничества в регионе ЕЭК, которая определит стратегические направления будущей деятельности ЕЭК на пороге XXI века, отразит новые реалии в регионе с учетом потребностей и приоритетов экономического развития стран переходного периода, а также Плана действий по практической реорганизации Комиссии, отвечающего трем правильно поставленным задачам, а именно: целенаправленности, гибкости и эффективности.

Как нам представляется, будущая деятельность ЕЭК должна сочетать в себе как уже зарекомендовавшие себя с точки зрения вклада в развитие стран-членов области, так и новые перспективные направления сотрудничества, отвечающие долгосрочным задачам развития региона. От чего-то, вероятно, в новых условиях целесообразно и отказаться.

Интересам всех стран - членов ЕЭК отвечало бы, как мы считаем, сохранение и дальнейшее наращивание общего компонента деятельности ЕЭК, в первую очередь в таких областях, как промышленность, торговля, транспорт, энергетика, окружающая среда, разработка и унификация конвенций, норм и стандартов.

Одним из центральных направлений будущей работы Комиссии должны стать, без сомнения, вопросы помощи странам переходного периода, содействия инвестиционной деятельности, развития малого и среднего предпринимательства. Полезным для работы Комиссии будет дальнейшее развитие сотрудничества с частным бизнесом при условии четкого соблюдения межправительственного характера Комиссии и ее мандата.

Мы приветствуем также планы расширения сотрудничества ЕЭК с другими региональными и субрегиональными организациями, такими, как ОБСЕ, Совет Европы и ОЭСР, а также с Комиссией Европейского Сообщества. Как заметил вчера Генеральный секретарь Организации Объединенных Наций г-н Кофи Аннан: "Комиссия нашла практические пути укрепления сотрудничества с другими... организациями, институтами, усилила диалог с гражданским обществом и деловыми кругами". Предметом такого сотрудничества могла бы стать совместная подготовка аналитических исследований, организация совещаний и рабочих семинаров, осуществление проектов технической и консультативной помощи, подготовка кадров.

Следует отметить тесное сотрудничество с ЭСКАТО в разработке совместных проектов для Центральной Азии. Региональные советники двух Комиссий приступили к реализации Специальной программы для стран Центральной Азии (СПЕКА), идея разработки которой была выдвинута Республикой Казахстан и цель которой заключается в максимилизации тех преимуществ, которые может получить данный регион благодаря опыту и наработкам этих организаций.

Среди намеченных программ - стимулирование межрегионального сотрудничества в рамках региона ЕЭК и ЭСКАТО; развитие и координация транспортной инфраструктуры; поощрение прямых иностранных инвестиций и другие. Реализация этих проектов жизненно необходима как Республике Казахстан, так и другим государствам региона, и очень важным представляется теперь вопрос их эффективного финансирования. На всех этапах осуществления проектов в рамках СПЕКА будут предприниматься попытки наладить тесное сотрудничество с ПРООН. Пользуясь тем, что в зале находятся представители стран-партнеров и доноров нашей страны, мне хотелось бы обратиться к ним с призывом рассмотреть возможность содействия в финансировании программ, представляющих взаимную пользу и интерес.

Как государство, идущее по пути тесной интеграции в многостороннюю торговую систему и активно приступившее к процессу присоединения к ВТО, Казахстан будет всячески поддерживать продолжение работы ЕЭК по вопросам облечения доступа товаров и услуг стран переходного периода на международные рынки, устранения пока еще сохраняющихся препятствий и ограничений на пути их экспорта.

Как страна, не имеющая выхода к морю и в то же время расположенная на перекрестке стратегически важных магистралей по линиям Запад-Восток и Север-Юг, Казахстан придает приоритетное внимание вопросам развития транспорта и коммуникаций в регионе. В этой связи мы призываем более активно увязать мероприятия в рамках проектов в сфере транспорта с транспортными и коммуникационными потребностями Центральной Азии, которая должна рассматриваться как естественный и наиболее эффективный связующий мост между обширными рынками Европы и Азии. С учетом развивающегося диалога Европа - Азия активное развитие транспортно-коммуникационных систем Центральной Азии несет в себе огромный экономический потенциал Европы.

Говоря о приоритетных задачах на ближайшее будущее и XXI век в целом, мы выделяем охрану окружающей среды как сферу основного внимания в контексте устойчивого развития стран - членов ЕЭК. С этой точки зрения, разработка и реализация специальных экологических программ для различных регионов являются одной из важнейших задач Комиссии. В этом контексте мы бы приветствовали активное привлечение специалистов и экспертов ЕЭК для изучения проблем Аральского моря и разработки специальной программы по спасению Арала при координации с другими специализированными агентствами Организации Объединенных Наций и международными институтами, а также оказания необходимой помощи населению, проживающему в регионе бедствия. К этому призывает и "Алматинская делегация", принятая главами государств Казахстана, Кыргызстана, Таджикистана, Туркменистана и Узбекистана на саммите в Алматы в феврале 1997 года, которая объявляет 1998 год Годом защиты окружающей среды в регионе Центральной Азии под эгидой Организации Объединенных Наций.

В заключение, г-н Председатель, разрешите выразить нашу убежденность в том, что Европейская экономическая комиссия будет и далее играть роль важного органа сотрудничества государств Европы и Центральной Азии в торгово-экономической и научно-технической областях и значение Комиссии будет еще более возрастать, учитывая глобальный и многосторонний характер ее деятельности.

STATEMENT BY MR. GUNTARS KRASTS, MINISTER OF ECONOMY OF LATVIA

It is a great pleasure for me, on behalf of the Government of Latvia, to address this Jubilee Session of the Economic Commission for Europe. This session marks an important milestone in our common efforts to make the ECE more effective and useful for our countries.

The Economic Commission for Europe remains for us one of the major intergovernmental policy forums for dialogue and for establishing norms and agreements on issues of international economic and social importance. It is also the main body for articulating a shared vision that advances European and internationally sustainable development.

Latvia believes that the ECE has a significant role in building dialogue between member countries. During recent years the world has changed substantially. International organizations have had to adapt in order to fit into a transformed political and economic environment.

The documents we have before us, and which we will have to approve today, outline the ECE's further actions and will be the basis for drastic reforms. Latvia is convinced that these reforms will streamline the ECE's work by strengthening its areas of greatest expertise and by providing a clear vision of the future, thus allowing the ECE to enhance its unique role in providing for dialogue between the governments.

Over the last five years, Latvia has experienced dramatic adjustments in the structure of its external trade. A fundamental reorientation of the direction of trade has occurred, but the adjustment has been painful. In 1991 more that 90% of exports went to the former Soviet Union. By 1996, 70% of exports went to markets in Western Europe and the rest of the world and only 30% to CIS countries.

We greatly appreciate what has been done by the ECE since 1991 when these changes started to take place in Latvia. The transition from a planned to a market economy, a shift in foreign trade patterns and massive privatization have been only some of the challenges faced by the Latvian Government. At the same time Latvia has had to ensure its continued functioning in the international economic community and its ability to meet the challenges and to seize the opportunities offered.

Latvia also must adapt its government institutions and policy frameworks to support new patterns of economic integration that promote economic development and growth. Latvia is developing a national trade and investment strategy that includes negotiating and implementing bilateral and regional trade agreements, completing accession to the WTO and utilizing multilateral trade and economic institutions, especially the WTO, to Latvia's and its partners' mutual advantage.

This complex set of policies needs to be communicated clearly to the private sector, both domestically and internationally. Therefore Latvia supports the ECE's intention to involve the business community in those of its activities that are of particular interest to the private sector.

Latvia supports the work of the newly established Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport precisely because Latvia is one of the important trading cross-roads between Eastern and Western Europe.

The ECE is already giving significant support to countries in transition that are wiling to integrate into global markets by bringing their transport systems into line with those in other countries of the region. The ECE must continue its work in this area by providing countries in transition with assistance and information on common technical and legal issues related to the development of coherent international infrastructure networks.

The Expert Group on private investment in large infrastructure projects has proven its usefulness and we look forward to participating in the Forum for Promoting Foreign Direct Investments in Transition Economies this summer. We also encourage the work of the technical assistance programme on real estate development, and believe that this could be another area where ECE expertise could achieve important results.

One of the priorities of the ECE is, and should remain in future, the environment. To hasten the process of integration into European markets, and to improve the environmental situation of Latvia, considerable support could be provided by the ECE through preparation and publication of an "Environmental Performance Review for Latvia".

I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the ECE secretariat on its efficient information collection and dissemination, namely for the comparative analysis of economic statistics and development in the form of the Economic Survey of Europe. This is a valuable tool for understanding the overall picture of economic development and for defining policy priorities.

Latvia greatly appreciates the ECE's continued assistance in the integration of countries in transition into the European and global economy through its many activities.

During the past fifty years the ECE has gained experience and developed expertise in various fields. This makes it a valuable instrument for development and harmonization of economic policy as well as for refining policy implementation tools. Latvia supports a strong and revitalized ECE which serves the interests of its members according to clearly defined directions.

STATEMENT BY MRS ANDREA WILLI, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

Let me at the outset express my thanks and appreciation to the secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe and especially to the Executive Secretary of the Commission for the excellent organization of this Jubilee Session of the ECE.

Almost two years after the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, we can celebrate and congratulate today the Economic Commission for Europe for 50 years of work and success. The ECE represents for us member States an important organization to express our views and problems and secures the consideration of our common interests within the United Nations system.

The States meeting today are linked both by common values and common economic interests and also share the history of the past 50 years. Today, all members of the ECE subscribe to the principles of democracy and market economy. Major reform steps in 1990 allowed the ECE to develop deeper and wider areas of work and to assist central and east European countries in rebuilding their economic structure.

In the spirit of mutual understanding, it is our aim to strengthen economic cooperation and policy convergence in orde. to promote economic prosperity in the ECE region. Through various conventions, norms and standards, the ECE contributed to prevent and reduce pollution, to develop transport infrastructure, to diminish the risk of road accidents, to facilitate border crossings and to simplify trade procedures. Various activities have taken place to assist the countries in transition on their way to a market economy.

Today, we will adopt a declaration to pay tribute to the past achievements of the Commission as well as a Plan of Action which will enable the Commission to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Liechtenstein welcomes the principles and mechanisms set out in the Plan of Action which meet in an impressive way the aims of focus, flexibility and efficiency.

There are a number of international organizations which are working in similar fields. We welcome the strengthening of cooperation with these bodies as well as with other regional institutions and subregional groupings taking into account the proven advantages of those organizations. It is also necessary to cooperate with such organizations as the OSCE and of course the EU.

Liechtenstein has been an observer to the ECE as from 1976 and became a full member in 1990. Liechtenstein is a member of several conventions initiated by the ECE. Being also a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), the membership in ECE is a useful and complementary means of safeguarding economic interests.

1997 will be an eventful year for the ECE. The implementation of the comprehensive reform will need a lot of energy. This year, the environmental concern deserves the member States' particular attention. In June, the United Nations special session of the General Assembly will be held to review the progress on the implementation of Agenda 21 and to define priorities and measures concerning its further implementation. Within the ECE region, the emphasis will be on the preparation of the Fourth Ministerial Conference "Environment for Europe".

Liechtenstein is convinced that all member States of the Commission will benefit from the reforms outlined in the Plan of Action which will strengthen the ECE as an instrument not only for economic cooperation but also for peace and stability in the ECE region. We wish the ECE continued success and the Plan of Action a good start and a successful implementation.

STATEMENT BY MR. VINCAS KĘSTUTIS BABILIUS, MINISTER OF ECONOMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

It is a great honour and privilege for me to address the Jubilee Session of the Economic Commission for Europe. It is a real pleasure to congratulate the Economic Commission for Europe on its 50th anniversary and appreciate what it has accomplished during all those years.

For half a century the Commission has played a great role bridging the West and East, especially in the post-war period, serving as a forum for the exchange of economic ideas and cooperation within Europe, a forum for dialogue and an opportunity simply to better understand each other.

The new political realities of the last decade neither question its role nor require a complete change of the direction of its activities. They only ask for certain effective adjustments in the Commission, but not at the expense of its main areas of excellence.

Among new factors to be taken into consideration, for example, are expansion of the ECE region as well as the transition of many ECE member States towards the market economy.

We support the ideas on regionalism expressed yesterday in this hall by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan. It is really a pragmatic partnership that governs effective regional groupings. But the mix of elements on the basis of which the grouping emerges may differ. And it determines the nature of cooperation. One mix of manageable elements is for cooperation between the Baltic States, another for cooperation within the Council of the Baltic Sea States, Lithuania being an active member of both groupings.

The Pan-European nature of ECE, therefore, in our opinion, requires the Commission to continue to be mainly involved in transport, statistics, environmental protection, trade facilitation, i.e. areas where common interest is strongest.

The Government of Lithuania is of the opinion that the outcome of the negotiations on the reform package in the ECE is a good compromise, reached in a spirit of cooperation, and essentially accommodates all member States. We are convinced that it will serve as a good basis for effective restructuring of the ECE, as an example for other United Nations institutions to follow within the overall reform process.

To the extent possible, Lithuania actively participates in ECE activities. It is not without the contribution of the ECE that Lithuania is well on the track of fast economic reforms which profoundly reshape the country's economic life. Let me share with you some of our achievements and problems.

After regaining independence (11 March 1990) Lithuania embarked on a rapid reform process of transition towards a market economy (liberalization of prices, creation of private sector, etc.). The introduction of these economic reforms was rather complicated, therefore economic recession was difficult to escape. In 1993 the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) accounted only for about 40% of the level of 1989. The first signs of economic growth were marked in 1994 when GDP increased by 1%. The country's GDP increased by 3% in 1995 and by 3.6% in 1996. In 1997 the increase of GDP is foreseen to be 5%. The growth of GDP has been attained due to formed relations of a market economy, expansion of the services sector, increase in manufacturing, etc.

Strict fiscal and monetary policies pursued by Lithuania resulted in a drop in inflation: the rate of inflation went down from 1163% in 1992 to 13.1% in 1996. It is foreseen that inflation in 1997 will not exceed that of 1996.

The unemployment rate has started to diminish recently. While at the beginning of 1996 the unemployment rate stood at 8.1%, the end of the year saw the unemployment rate of 6.2%.

Foreign capital is attracted by establishing joint and foreign capital companies. There are over 5,000 such companies on the register list. Direct foreign investments amounted to 450 million USD at the beginning of 1997.

In 1996 the foreign trade balance of Lithuania was negative and amounted to more than 1 bn USD or 14% of Gross Domestic Product. The negative foreign trade balance is conditioned by import of mineral products (energy resources mainly).

In recent years the geographical structure of Lithuanian foreign trade has changed dramatically. In 1993 trade turnover with the CIS countries accounted for 62.6% and with the EU countries for 17.8% of the total Lithuanian foreign trade volume, while in 1996 it was 38.1% and 38.7% respectively.

Economic and social development of the economy of Lithuania is greatly affected by the process of integration into the European Union. One of the basic tasks here is harmonization of Lithuanian legislation with the legal basis of the European union.

Nowadays the essential goal of our economic policy is to create conditions for constant and dynamic development of the economy. To attain this goal, it is necessary to accelerate the introduction of structural reforms, to support activities of viable economic entities. When striving for membership in the European Union, we shall have to complete liberalization of our economy, accelerate and improve the second stage of privatization, i.e. privatization for cash, to reform the energy sector and radically improve its financial position. We hope that after having accomplished these tasks, we shall approximate macro-economic indices of Lithuania to the level inherent to member States of the European Union.

Lithuania has chosen the road of open economy: free trade agreements have already been signed with the European Union, the EFTA countries, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Poland, Ukraine. Lithuania's trade with Latvia and Estonia is regulated by a trilateral free trade agreement.

After enacting the Law on the Credibility of the Litas, the policy of a fixed rate of Litas was pursued. At the early stage of economic stabilization it had a certain positive effect: confidence of enterprises and population in the fixed currency exchange rate regime was ensured, moreover monetary policy pursued by the Central Bank of Lithuania was free from the influence of different economic groups. As we see it now, the Currency Board had a rather significant impact on curbing inflation.

Decrease of inflation and of interest rate, increase of foreign currency reserves as well as development of institutional financial markets created preconditions for the gradual expansion of monetary policy measures and a return to the classical model of the functioning of the Central Bank through gradual elimination of the Currency Board system. We hope it will create grounds for future harmonization of the monetary policy of Lithuania with that of the EU.

One of the most urgent challenges is stirring up of the investment process and accelerated updating of production on the basis of modern technologies. The general economic recession of the last five years had a negative impact on the investment process. Investment has decreased by more than 3.5 times. Only by 1995 did the investment process become more active.

The investment policy is being pursued in accordance with the priority guidelines of the development of Lithuania's economy by directing funds for the development of energy, transport, communications, environmental protection sectors, as well as meeting the most urgent social needs.

It is my pleasure to note the increased interest of foreign investors in Lithuania. Foreign capital flow into Lithuania helps to radically restructure the basic sectors of our economy, update technologies and create new ones. Profits that are used for investment are exempt from taxes. Contributions of foreign investors to the enterprise's authorized capital that is being used as long-term assets are brought into Lithuania free from custom duties. Profits that belong to foreign investors by the right of ownership, and income or dividends received, can be transferred abroad without any restrictions, subject to prior fulfilment of internal taxation obligations.

Three Free Economic Zones are being established near cities which are situated on international highways convenient for transport links and which have a well-developed infrastructure, sufficient resources of high-skill labour. Economic activity in these zones is expected to add vigour to economic life in general thanks to the fact that the laws of the Republic of Lithuania provide special privileges for operators in these zones.

Naturally, Lithuania has problems to be addressed. We hope for and would appreciate the contribution of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, in accordance with its mandate, in helping to solve these problems.

Abatement of air and water pollution, industrial and household waste management is an area of global concern. Lithuania effectively implements a number of programmes in this sector. We would like to appreciate here the active cooperation of European countries and significant assistance they render to us in this field.

We acknowledge the concern of many countries about the safety level of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant. At present the comprehensive Safety Improvement Programme prepared in 1993 is coming to the completion of its implementation. In April of this year a new Safety Improvement Programme, taking into account the Safety Analysis Report, Review of Safety Analysis Report and recommendations of the Ignalina Safety Panel, was prepared and approved. The new programme is planned to be implemented in 1997-1999. Our goal is to make the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant the safest in its class.

Lithuania is faced with the problem of diversification of supply of primary energy resources. We actively examine possible ways of integrating Lithuania's electricity and gas supply systems into those of Western Europe. To the extent possible, we participate in projects which foresee integration of the electricity ("Baltic Ring") and gas supply (the North European direction) networks.

When speaking about the energy sector it is important to note that we plan, through transferring the function of heating to municipalities, to commence and finish decentralization of the heating sector by July of this year. Audits of activities of energy companies will be carried out in order to define cost reducing measures in the energy sector. We shall further proceed with firm action aimed at improving discipline in energy consumer payment. The State Commission for the Control over Prices of Energy Resources and Energy Activities has been formed and is accountable to the President of the Republic of Lithuania. The main task of the Commission is to analyse, approve and submit to the Government suggestions concerning the introduction of effective prices and tariffs.

While concluding this statement I would like to express my conviction that the Declaration on the strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe and the Plan of Action to be adopted later on will give a new impetus for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe to continue to play a significant role in the cooperation of its member countries in the field of its mandate.

STATEMENT BY MR. GEORGE W. VELLA, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER
AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF MALTA

May I first of all offer my heartfelt congratulations on your unanimous election to preside over this important session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe marking the Jubilee Year since its establishment.

The presence of the United Nations Secretary-General, H.E. Kofi Annan, in the celebration of the Commission's past, present and redefined future as well as his most welcome address earlier this afternoon, reflect in my view the dedication and commitment which our organization attributes to the work of the regional commissions.

I would like to extend special congratulations to the ECE secretariat, ably led by its Executive Secretary, Mr. Yves Berthelot, for the very valid contribution it has been making over the year which has helped in creating a climate conducive to dialogue and cooperation in the region.

ECE and the Reform Process

This session is important to the ECE for many reasons. Apart from being a celebration, marking its half century, it is also a "new start" for the Commission, as a result of our decisions, over almost two years of discussions and negotiations. We believe that even in the area of reform the ECE is also setting standards in the United Nations system, by starting the process of reform in first identifying the priorities of the States members of the Commission. This redefined role of the Commission will complement and contribute in a concrete manner to the exercise being undertaken by the UN Secretary-General to restructure and revitalize the United Nations.

Malta has been privileged to be involved in and to have contributed to this process, in keeping with its tradition of its continuing concern with how the United Nations can be made more relevant and efficient. It is for this reason that we have always insisted that while discussing the reform of ECE we should never lose sight of the wider debate on the reform of the United Nations.

New Strategic Directions

The adoption of the Plan of Action during this session of the Commission signifies an important step forward and provides for a revitalized ECE that will hopefully "continue to facilitate and strengthen the involvement of all member countries in harmonious economic relations". Malta views the Plan of Action as the culmination of a very detailed examination of what the ECE actually does, what resources are available to it, and the affirmation of the fact that it should continue to do what it does best in the opinion of its member States.

Likewise, the Draft Declaration on the Strengthening of Economic Cooperation, which this session will also adopt, highlights in clear terms what the future of this organization looks like and how it continue to be relevant to Europe, to the World and to the United Nations system as a whole.

The Plan of Action and the Declaration provide a firm foundation for the acceleration of economic integration in the entire European continent. I would like here to make a special reference to the new "Coordinating Unit for Special Activities" whose work is to be directed at the needs of specific subregions in the ECE, including the Mediterranean, which can be described as Europe's gateway to the African and Asian continents.

The political, economic and social structures of our societies are undergoing tremendous pressures a result of emerging new challenges including in particular illicit arms and drug trafficking, money laundering, illegal migration as well as environmental degradation. Perhaps no other region is so much exposed to these challenges than the Mediterranean.

It was therefore with a certain hesitation, and in a spirit of compromise, that Malta decided to go along with the consensus reached on the Plan of Action and accept the changes introduced to terminate or eliminate certain ECE activities that might have had some significance to certain member States. However, our acceptance of the new mechanisms does not mean that we will abandon our Mediterranean dimension within the Commission. On the contrary, we will ensure that Mediterranean concerns will continue to be given careful and due consideration in the Commission itself as well as in its Principal Subsidiary Bodies.

Malta strongly believes that the Economic Commission for Europe must continue to give the Mediterranean Chapter of the Helsinki Final Act the importance it deserves. Indeed, the intimate relationship which exists between security and cooperation in Europe and security and cooperation in the Mediterranean continues to be as relevant today as it was in 1975, when it was first enunciated in Helsinki.

I must here recall that for the last 20 years Malta pioneered and piloted a decision related to the strengthening of economic cooperation in the Mediterranean at every Annual Session of this Commission. Initially, and until very recently, the text of this decision mainly reflected the link of the on-going valuable work undertaken within the CSCE, now the OSCE, in the Mediterranean, in the light of the Final Act of the CSCE. At the Commission's fifty-first session in 1996 the format was changed and the decision took a more holistic approach in order to reflect the important work being undertaken by the Euro-Mediterranean process. Through this decision the ECE is now in a position to cover activities and areas of benefit to a wider spectrum of countries including those styled as Mediterranean partners for cooperation within the OSCE.

We welcome this development and we look forward to working with the ECE secretariat as well as with other delegations to advance further the aspirations of the Mediterranean countries in this Commission.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership

A few days ago, the Second Euro-Mediterranean Conference at Foreign Ministers level was held in Malta. The decision taken by the Barcelona Committee to hold the Ministerial Conference in Malta came at an important juncture in the evolving relationship between the European Union and the 12 Mediterranean partners. The Conference came at a time when the economic and social pressures on the littoral States of the Mediterranean are increasing and become more pronounced.

Malta believes that the Euro-Mediterranean process is making a valid contribution to and is addressing in no small way the resolve to reduce the ever-widening economic and social gap which for many years has been one of the destabilizing factors of the region. Malta feels that the European Union's initiative provides and offers new and innovative opportunities to reinforce the much needed cooperation and collaboration between and among all participating States.

It was indeed of great satisfaction for the Government of Malta to have had the honour and the privilege to have hosted such an impressive number of eminent leaders coming from Europe and the Mediterranean States to what can be described as a historical gathering on a small island that has given so much to ensure peace, stability and cooperation in an otherwise turbulent sea.

The Malta Euro-Mediterranean Conference has confirmed the genuine and sincere will of the Partners to commit themselves in safeguarding and nurturing the process that they launched with so much vision and promise in Barcelona in November 1995. While the results of the Malta Conference might appear positive but limited, in reality the results are impressive and far-reaching.

The interlinkages between security and social development, which were moulded together at Barcelona, have been reaffirmed and reinforced in Malta.

The Malta Conclusions have also correctly redressed the imbalance which existed in all three baskets of the Barcelona Programme of Action where the political and security chapter was overtaking progress in the economic and financial and the social, cultural and human affairs chapters.

Malta's primary objective within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership process lies in advancing initiatives which bring the Barcelona process closer to the individual citizens in our respective countries, including cooperation in the areas of education and health; cooperation and interaction between peoples of different cultures and religions; the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms; the fight against organized crime; and cooperation at the parliamentary and non-governmental levels. References to these aspects as well as other important issues in the Malta Conclusions have been hailed by all the partners in the Barcelona process as a most welcome and most encouraging achievements that provides a good basis for the tasks ahead, leading to the third Ministerial Conference to be held in Germany.

The new Maltese Government's primary objective is that of promoting and enhancing peace, stability, prosperity and development in the Mediterranean region. Malta views the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as a meaningful and far-reaching dialogue which is in line with its European and Mediterranean vocation.

The role which the Economic Commission for Europe could and can play in fostering Euro-Mediterranean cooperation cannot but be emphasized. We note with satisfaction that the documentation submitted to this Jubilee Session of the Commission gives considerable emphasis to the efforts which the ECE has given in promoting Mediterranean activities. As a

protagonist in these endeavours, Malta expects that these activities would not only be continued but also that these activities of interest and benefit to Mediterranean member States should be extended to include programmes and projects between the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe, thus, to use the title of the High Level Round table, helping to forge cohesion in Europe.

In concluding, I would like to reiterate again the commitment of my country to the future of this Commission, which for the past fifty years has played a major role in the economic integration of our continent, even in difficult circumstances. Fifty years of efforts by the Commission to make our region a stronger and better one for our societies is an event which deserves our full recognition.

Malta sincerely hopes that the new millennium will usher in a renewed and invigorated approach in developing further the cooperation within the framework of the Economic Commission for Europe, in being an instrument for the implementation of the principles and aims of the Charter of the United Nations at the regional level, in being able to respond rapidly to the needs of countries developing from the economic point of view, to contribute with other institutions to a new spirit of concerted action and common purpose in the region.

Malta solemnly reiterates its full commitment and its readiness to work more closely with all member States of the ECE so that this unique instrument of ours can manifestly and with full reaffirmation contribute to the new European architecture that is evolving in our times. These are times where as a key instrument of pan-European cooperation, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe can, with our full support and assistance, accomplish more for the benefit of many.

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION BY MRS. ANNEKE VAN DOK - VAN WEELE, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN TRADE OF THE NETHERLANDS

On behalf of the European Union, of which the Netherlands has the honour to hold the presidency at present, it is my pleasure to congratulate the Economic Commission for Europe on its 50th anniversary and its many achievements during these years.

We welcome the presence of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who we hope will share with us his thoughts and ideas on the future of the ECE within the UN system.

The EU would like to express its appreciation for the efforts of the Executive Secretary, in leading the secretariat through challenging years of unprecedented political and economic changes in the European landscape. Given the financial restraints in the UN system, certainly this task has not been easy.

In the context of the 50th anniversary we also celebrate the adoption of an important declaration on the future orientations of the ECE along with a "Plan of Action" which significantly changes the work programme and working methods of this organization.

A good deal of the credit for this substantial reform package goes to the ECE Bureau and in particular Ambassador Lodewijk Willems, who will now leave as chairman of the Commission. We are extremely grateful for his creativity and perseverance in finding solutions.

We are confident that the new bureau which will be elected during this session will have the same spirit of determination and commitment to fully implement the Plan of Action and to further streamline the ECE. In this regard we offer Ambassador Naray, the incoming chairman, our best wishes and full support.

Allow me to elaborate a bit more on the reform process. During the past two years we had to make up our minds on what role the ECE could play as a forum for cooperation and assistance. It was clear that choices had to be made. After all, resources are limited, the environment in which the ECE operates is changing and the ECE is only one of the international organizations in this part of the world.

From the start of this reform process on it was very reassuring, and I say this with some emphasis to the Secretary-General, that among the member States there was a consensus that we wanted to concentrate ECE's work on those areas in which it had developed specific and unique expertise. Those areas were found to be: transport, the environment, trade facilitation, statistics, timber, norms and standards for automobiles and for perishable agricultural products.

Focusing the programme of work meant: "doing less things, but at the same time doing them better", but having more resources available to the sectors that remained. This implied that certain activities had to be discontinued, either because they were no longer relevant or because they were carried out by other international organizations.

Furthermore, as reform is a continuing process, we have established a consultative mechanism to examine the relevance of the Commission's activities on a regular basis and, if necessary, make adjustments.

We have made considerable efforts to make ECE meetings more productive. Many of the proposals to this effect have come from within the secretariat. Our immediate task after this jubilee session is to implement the Plan of Action.

At the same time the European Union welcomes ideas that will further improve the productiveness of the sessions and that may further streamline the governance structure. In this regard we thank the Executive Secretary for his recent note on the feasibility of having the Commission's sessions once every two years and on moving the session from April to Autumn.

We look forward to a thorough discussion on his note after this jubilee session. It is only one element on how within the broader context of the UN reform we could improve the effectiveness and productivity of our Commission. And again, I take the opportunity of the presence of the Secretary General to single out one more element for future consideration. For the ECE secretariat to be able to respond more swiftly and flexibly to the tasks assigned to the ECE, a high degree of delegation of authority in the sphere of financial and personnel management may be appropriate.

We are experiencing developments which only ten years ago seemed unthinkable. At this moment the European Union is on the verge of taking a number of crucial decisions with regard to the future of European integration. In June the EU Member States expect to conclude the Intergovernmental Conference in Amsterdam, thus clearing the way for the further enlargement of the Union.

The political changes on our continent are still fresh in our minds. Despite the impressive progress that has been made since then, the transition process in many of the ECE's member States still causes quite a number of huge problems, particularly in the economic and social fields.

The EU continues to develop closer relations with the countries in transition through Association Agreements and Partnership and Cooperation Agreements. With the Mediterranean countries this cooperation develops through the Barcelona process. Accordingly, the EU is adapting its PHARE, TACIS and MEDA programmes. Later on, the European Commission will speak about this in more detail.

As the political landscape and the economic challenges in Europe are subject to constant change, so must be the ECE.

The Economic Commission for Europe plays a significant role and will continue to do so, provided it is able to respond to these developments effectively. I am confident that the current spirit of cooperation that has made this reform possible will prevail in the many years to come.

STATEMENT BY MR. PER LUDVIG MAGNUS, ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL, ROYAL MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF NORWAY

The jubilee session marks a new era in the history of the ECE. The Commission will confirm important steps towards a more efficient, focused and demand driven activity within its mandate. This is the result of hard work carried out through close and constructive cooperation between the Executive Secretary, the Chairman of the Commission, the Bureau, the secretariat and the member countries.

The reform process, in which Norway has taken an active part, was necessary not only because of budgetary constraints. It was just as much a result of the need for the ECE to review its role and its functions within a changing political and institutional framework for European cooperation. From a Norwegian perspective, we also see the ECE reform as a necessary part of an overall reform of the United Nations, as put forward in the Nordic reform proposal submitted to the Secretary-General in January.

Norway firmly believes that the reform process and the "Plan of Action" will take the ECE a long step in the right direction. We now have the elements and structure to ensure that the ECE can maintain its relevance and impact in the years to come. However, it is still mainly a reform on paper. The hard work, which means transferring our objectives into concrete results, still remains. I can assure you that Norway will do its utmost to take an active part in this process.

I would now like to comment on five specific areas of ECE work, namely environment, energy, statistics, trade facilitation and timber. My Government is pleased that environment has been clearly identified in the Plan of Action as one of the key areas for present and future ECE cooperation, and that additional resources will be allocated to this area. Cooperation in this area is dynamic and future-oriented. We attach in particular great importance to the further development of regional legal instruments in the area of air pollution within the framework of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution. This cooperation has resulted in major improvements in the air pollution situation in our region and is leading to several new legal instruments for limiting and reducing air pollution. We urge in this respect member countries concerned to strengthen efforts to ratify the Second Sulphur Protocol, signed in Oslo in June 1994.

Environmental cooperation within the framework of the ECE has been strengthened through the Environment for Europe process. Environment for Europe links governments, international organizations, financial institutions and non-governmental organizations in a continuous effort to strengthen environmental management and capacity-building in our region. The ECE continues to perform a vital function in helping to coordinate preparations for the Ministerial Conferences under this process. We expect that the next Conference in Denmark in 1998 will be an important milestone in this work. In this respect we strongly support the efforts to complete by that occasion the important new Draft Convention on Public Participation.

Active participation in the international debate on energy is given high priority by the Norwegian Government. The international energy cooperation within the ECE has in our opinion been particularly useful in promoting energy efficiency through the Energy Efficiency 2000 Project. It is important that the reforms in the ECE and the creation of a new Committee on Sustainable Energy lead to a continued and targeted focus on practical energy efficiency. We know that the challenges in this field are immense in the ECE region.

The ECE reform process has led to a downscaling of the activities in the field of energy. In our view, there is no room for further cuts in this field if we want the ECE to continue to play an active role in meeting the challenges of sustainable energy development.

For international cooperation in the statistical field the work of ECE through the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) has been and still is of great importance. In covering the whole of Europe, the CES is the leading organization in its field. To our satisfaction its level of activity has not been reduced in the reform process.

We would like to emphasize that the primary function of the CES is to coordinate international statistical work in the ECE region. There is no alternative to the Conference of European Statisticians in its function as coordinator. In the future, we would like to see an escalation of the work to improve economic, social and environmental statistics, and to increase statistical comparability for the whole ECE area.

In most industrialized countries top level political initiatives have been taken to implement Electronic Data Interface (EDI) and Electronic Commerce, both in the private and the public sector. In order to establish harmonized worldwide systems which meet the user communities' needs, we still need more EDI standards as well as a simplification of international trade procedures.

In this respect it is vital that the Centre for Facilitation of Procedures and Practices for Administration, Commerce and Transport (CEFACT) is given the necessary resources to fulfil its task, namely to supply the various user communities with EDI standards and abolish technical barriers in international trade. Otherwise users will lose confidence in the ECE's function as a recognized international standardization body. A strong CEFACT organization is also a necessary precondition for the ECE to be able to assist economies in transition to use simplified trade procedures and to implement EDI and Electronic Commerce.

Finally, I would like to emphasize the value of the excellent work done by the Timber Committee and its secretariat on market reviews on forest products, and the outlook studies for the supply and demand for timber and non-wood goods and services. The Committee's work in relation to the Forest Resources Assessment 2000 in cooperation with the FAO will be a major task in the coming years, and Norway is looking forward to participating actively in this process.

STATEMENT BY MR. LUDWIK DEMBINSKI, AMBASSADOR,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

When adopting the Declaration on the strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe, my delegation wants to pay tribute to the Economic Commission for Europe, which throughout its 50 years history successfully served the diversified interests of the member countries and at the same time was able to maintain its high professional profile. At every political and economic breakthrough on our continent the ECE managed to adapt itself to new realities and new demands.

The reform initiatives on the basis of the famous Commission decision 0 (45) marked a first step towards seeking an appropriate place for the ECE on our continent, free of artificial, political barriers.

The present restructuring, perhaps the most ambitious, is trying to meet challenges resulting from both the new needs of member countries - the number of which has increased considerably - and from financial constraints affecting the UN system. I am convinced that the choices made by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency, assisted with dedication by the secretariat and successfully guided by the Bureau under the chairmanship of Ambassador L. Willems, meet our expectations and deserve our praise.

The Plan of Action we are going to adopt offers new opportunities to the Commission on the verge of the year 2000. Its emphasis on the organic work rather than on discussions on policy matters best reflects the changes that have occurred in our region. General acceptance of rules of democracy and market economy in our region make obsolete and irrelevant any ideological disputes at the Commission's meetings, so frequent in the past. This common approach permits and encourages us to seek jointly technical solutions to practical problems, to

bridge gaps between more and less advanced countries, in order to integrate better our economies and to soften the difficult period of "transition". The ECE has an unquestionable role to play in this process.

The challenges Poland is facing in environment and transport, most important domains of the ECE work, often go far beyond our technological and financial possibilities. ECE's contribution in meeting them is therefore of great value for my country and it will be so in the nearest future. We believe at the same time that ECE'S experience in these primordial areas can well serve the needs of other less advanced countries, for the benefit of the whole of Europe. The programme of work of the two Committees is well focused and flexible enough to respond to unpredictable developments.

We welcome with appreciation innovative methods of work in trade and related areas. Trade facilitation, contract practices in industry, development of a legal and economic basis for foreign direct investment accurately meet the needs of many countries in transition, especially those from the CIS. The Commission is well placed to play an important role in finding legal instruments matching interests of recipient countries and private foreign investors. The ECE provides a neutral forum where interested parties can meet and elaborate relevant guidelines or agreements. In this regard we support the increasing participation in the work of the ECE of the business community, which contributes a fresh approach free of bureaucratic routine. It is also in this spirit that we encourage the ECE to cooperate further with UNCTAD, the Bretton Woods Institutions, the OECD.

The same words of recognition refer to the Commission's efforts to assist countries in transition in building up their real estate markets, improve their land administration and housing. Seminars organized and Guidelines prepared in this regard by the ECE are of great practical value and should be continued in the future.

It was with some concern that we finally agreed that in some traditional ECE spheres of action like steel, chemical industry and to a certain extent energy, the programmes of work should be scaled down. The lack of resources, one of the main current problems of the UN, as well as decreasing interest of a number of countries, left little room for a reasonable alternative. Poland reaffirms its commitment to contribute to the implementation of important tasks remaining in these areas taking full advantage of the new ECE structure, outlined in the Plan of Action. Some activities like those carried out within the Gas Centre, financed through a voluntary fund, prove their efficiency and should encourage us to seek similar solutions in other fields suffering from budgetary constraints.

Looking into the future, let me briefly refer to the ongoing UN reform, in particular of ECOSOC in terms of preserving a specific role for our Commission. What I have in mind is a regional follow-up to the major international conferences organized by the UN in Copenhagen, Cairo, Beijing
and Istanbul and their social dimension. As it was stated on behalf of the European Union at the ECOSOC session in New York last July, the results of the Conferences represented a major step forward and the integrated nature of those results clearly demanded an integrated response. We fully agree with this statement.

In this context we do hope that the financial crisis of the UN will be overcome. It is true, we need resources for emergency operations - peace keeping or peace restoring, which are quite expensive. But we also need resources for long term preventive activities in the social and economic spheres which might be less expensive and more productive. We should strive to prevent the social problems from becoming a cause for concern in the context of peace and stability in our region.

DECLARATION DE MONSIEUR ION CAPATINA, VICE-MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES DE LA REPUBLIQUE DE MOLDOVA

Permettez-moi de vous exprimer ma profonde satisfaction pour l'opportunité qui m'est offerte de prendre la parole à la Session jubilaire de la Commission économique des Nations Unies pour l'Europe et de m'associer aux félicitations exprimées à l'occasion du cinquantième anniversaire de la création de la Commission, des félicitations que j'adresse, au nom de la République de Moldova, au Président, au secrétariat et aux pays membres de la Commission.

Une durée de cinquante ans d'activités est remarquable dans l'histoire de l'Organisation. Actuellement, outre l'énumération des résultats obtenus, une analyse de l'activité de la Commission durant cette période et une reformulation des priorités pour les années à venir s'imposent. Le secrétariat de la CEE-ONU a énormément oeuvré dans ce sens et je voudrais attirer votre attention sur quelques faits.

A travers son histoire, la Commission a participé d'une manière active au processus de redressement économique des pays européens ravagés par la deuxième guerre mondiale, à l'augmentation du niveau de l'activité économique en Europe. Pendant une longue période, elle a servi de médiateur entre deux systèmes antagonistes, étant un instrument de dialogue et de collaboration économique entre l'Est et l'Ouest. Après la fin de la Guerre froide, la Commission a été la première organisation du système des Nations Unies qui a tenu compte des changements survenus dans ses activités, tout en soutenant le processus de réformes dans les pays membres.

Il est difficile de tracer un parallèle entre la période actuelle et les événements qui se sont déroulés il y a un demi-siècle. Nonobstant, les problèmes qui se posent à présent aux pays de l'Europe de l'Est sont similaires à ceux auxquels était confronté l'Occident il y a cinquante ans. Dans ce cas, la riche expérience accumulée par la Commission tout au long de ces années est la bienvenue.

L'Organisation des Nations Unies se trouve à présent dans un processus continu de réformes. La CEE-ONU a réagi promptement aux changements politiques de l'Est de l'Europe, restructurant son activité et s'orientant vers le chaînon le plus vulnérable de l'Europe - les pays en transition économique.

Les besoins de ces pays sont multiples et divers, mais une série de problèmes sont communs. Il s'agit de la libéralisation du commerce, du secteur énergétique, de la protection de l'environnement, de l'industrie dans son ensemble etc. J'ai énuméré seulement quelques-uns du spectre très large des problèmes qui nécessitent une solution urgente. L'expérience de la Commission dans les domaines susmentionnés, les relations et le personnel qualifié sont très sollicités à l'heure actuelle.

Les transformations et les changements qui ont lieu actuellement sont également caractéristiques pour la République de Moldova. Il y a cinq ans, un vaste programme de réformes, ayant pour but primordial l'édification d'un système démocratique et d'économie de marché, a été lancé. Mais pendant cette période, nous avons été confrontés à divers problèmes d'ordre objectif et subjectif.

Nous comptons sur le soutien de la Commission économique des Nations Unies pour l'Europe dans la consolidation et la dynamisation du processus de réformes, dans l'élaboration d'une vision claire en vue du passage à l'économie de marché, dans le développement de relations économiques harmonieuses. Le rôle de la CEE dans l'analyse économique, l'élaboration des conventions, de la réglementation et des standards communs pour les pays européens est d'une importance particulière pour la mise en place des réformes en République de Moldova.

Nous saluons et soutenons la coopération de la CEE avec les autres organisations internationales qui mènent leur activité sur le continent européen. Conjuguant leurs efforts, elles apportent leur importante contribution au déploiement des activités politiques, économiques et culturelles en vue du renforcement de la paix et de la sécurité en Europe.

Un exemple éloquent en ce sens serait l'implication active de la Commission dans le processus de création et de fonctionnement de l'Initiative de coopération pour l'Europe du Sud-Est (SECI). La réalisation des projets proposés par la Commission, exemptés des formalités bureaucratiques, conduira à l'établissement de liens économiques étroits et mutuellement avantageux pour tous les pays, et aura un impact positif sur la situation politique dans cette région de l'Europe.

La délégation de la République de Moldova désire s'associer pleinement aux évaluations et aux appréciations sur la Déclaration et le Plan d'action exprimées par certains chefs de délégations. Nous souhaitons également accorder tout notre soutien à la Déclaration sur la consolidation de la coopération économique en Europe qui, à notre avis, est un document équilibré, orienté vers la recherche de solutions pragmatiques pour les problèmes cruciaux qui visent à la consolidation de la coopération économique en Europe. Je voudrais souligner, en particulier, la réorientation des actions de la Commission vers le soutien du processus d'édification de l'économie de marché dans les pays en transition d'un point de vue économique.

Je voudrais également mentionner que ces problèmes pourront être résolus seulement si les pays membres de la Commission adoptent des mesures concrètes et adéquates. Dans ce sens, l'adoption du Plan d'action en vue de la mise en oeuvre des dispositions de la Déclaration est un exemple éloquent d'activité opérationnelle efficace. La République de Moldova est disposée à participer d'une manière active à la réalisation de ce plan.

Je ne saurais terminer sans exprimer ma ferme conviction que les documents adoptés dans le cadre de cette réunion contribueront substantiellement au succès des réformes entamées au sein de la CEE et dans le système des Nations Unies en général, tout en favorisant le développement fructueux de la coopération économique entre les pays membres de la Commission et l'édification d'une Europe unie et prospère.

DECLARATION DE MONSIEUR LAZAR COMANESCU, SECRETAIRE D'ETAT AU MINISTERE DES AFFAIRES ETRANGERES DE ROUMANIE

Nous célébrons ici, à Genève, le cinquantière anniversaire de la Commission économique pour l'Europe, un moment historique sans précédent, qui va marquer, sans doute, son évolution future.

C'est avec un grand intérêt que nous avons accueilli l'allocation d'ouverture du Secrétaire général, votre Déclaration liminaire et celle du Secrétaire exécutif, qui ont toutes mis en exergue les acquis, l'expérience et les atouts de ce forum régional qui occupe une place unique de par son appartenance aux Nations Unies, son caractère pan-européen et transatlantique, ses compétences techniques reconnues, ainsi que sa faculté bien prouvée d'adaptation aux changements.

Nous tenons, nous aussi, à rendre hommage aux cinquante années d'action multilatérale de la Commission, ayant pour but l'intégration des pays de la région dans un ensemble cohérent et harmonieux.

En fait, durant un demi-siècle, la Commission non seulement a survécu, mais surtout - pour reprendre le thème de notre table-ronde - a démontré comment éviter les lignes de fracture en Europe, en apportant des réponses techniques à des problèmes politiques.

Tout en lui renouvelant notre confiance, nous considérons que la CEE-ONU doit aujourd'hui bénéficier d'une nuvelle impulsion et d'une plus grande vigueur pour qu'elle reprenne, de façon plus efficace et de concert avec les autres institutions européennes, les défis de la région, à l'aube du troisième millénaire. Car la période actuelle l'exige.

Tous les pays membres ont adhéré à l'économie de marché et à un système politique fondé sur la démocratie, ce qui leur donne, pour la première fois, la possibilité de façonner en commun les objectifs et les politiques de la région.

L'élargissement imminent vers l'Est de l'Union européenne, le renforcement des organisations sous-régionales, le rôle croissant des milieux d'affaires et des acteurs non-gouvernementaux, le processus en cours de restructuration touchant l'ONU dans son ensemble, voilà bien des développements qui vont marquer le mode de travail de notre Commission.

D'ailleurs, ceux-ci ont constitué les prémisses et les stimulants qui ont joué dans notre décision d'entreprendre, ces derniers temps, une réflexion commune et un effort concerté, visant une réforme en profondeur de la machinerie intergouvernementale et du programme de travail de la Commission, qui réponde à nos soucis de concertation, de flexibilité et d'efficacité.

Nous nous félicitons, Monsieur le Président, de voir ce processus - lancé sous la présidence d'un représentant roumain et qui se conclut sous votre clairvoyante et dynamique direction - aboutir à des principes, engagements et recommandations incorporés dans la "Déclaration" et le "Plan d'action", que nous allons si heureusement adopter à cette réunion commémorative.

Permettez-moi quelques réflexions seulement, inspirées par ces documents, sur la manière dont les nouvelles orientations stratégiques devront se traduire par des mesures concrètes, qui permettront de faire avancer l'intégration de l'Europe.

La première, c'est la nécessité que la CEE agisse comme un moteur de l'intégration économique. L'objectif reste d'aider les gouvernements dans leur choix des réformes et des politiques, dans le cadre d'une économie de marché. Dans ce contexte, nous attachons toute l'importance au principe inscrit dans le "Plan d'action", visant à ce que la Comission réponde en priorité aux demandes spécifiques des pays en transition de la région.

Deuxièmement, il s'agit de la promotion d'une coopération avec les institutions régionales et les organisations sous-régionales, qui soit fondée sur les complémentarités et les avantages comparatifs. Il faut saluer le fait que l'Union européenne est devenue un des principaux partenaires de la CEE. Nous avons également en vue d'autres institutions actives dans la région, telles que l'OSCE, l'OCDE, le Conseil de l'Europe, la BERD ainsi que des organisations sous-régionales comme le Conseil de Coopération économique de la Mer Noire, l'Initiative de l'Europe centrale. Il faut ajouter que le potentiel de la Commission s'est avéré, une fois de plus, utile au lancement de la récente Initiative de Coopération pour l'Europe du Sud-Est.

En troisième lieu, notons le souci d'associer davantage les milieux d'affaires, les acteurs non-gouvernementaux aux activités de la CEE. A nos yeux, la promotion des investissements et l'appui à la consolidation des petites et moyennes entreprises constituent les domaines les plus prometteurs pour faire avancer le partenariat entre les gouvernements et les entreprises.

Il y a une longue et fructueuse tradition de coopération entre la Roumanie et la CEE-ONU. Au fil des années, mon pays s'est vu confié l'honneur de présider, à trois reprises, la Commission et d'organiser, à Bucarest, les travaux d'une session plénière, ainsi qu'une trentaine de séminaires et ateliers de travail.

Les perspectives sont également bonnes pour développer davantage cette bénéfique coopération que nous considérons complémentaire et convergente avec notre démarche prioritiare d'intégrer le plus vite possible les structures européennes et euro-atlantiques.

Le nouveau gouvernement, issu d'une alternance démocratique au pouvoir, s'est résolument engagé dans une réforme économique radicale, sur la base d'un programme intégrant des mesures économiques, monétaires, fiscales et de protection sociale, convenu avec le FMI et la Banque mondiale, et soutenu par l'Union européenne. La privatisation accélérée et la restructuration de l'économie, l'encouragement des investisseurs étrangers se trouvent au centre de nos efforts, en vue de créer une économie de marché réelle et performante. Ce sont précisément les domaines où nous attendons un appui technique de la part des institutions internationales, telle que la CEE.

Pour conclure, une Commission revigorée par la réforme entérinée aujourd'hui pourra nous rendre encore de grands services. Voilà un défi qui peut être gagné.

ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЕ Г-НА СЕРОВА В.М., ЗАМЕСТИТЕЛЯ ПРЕДСЕДАТЕЛЯ ПРАВИТЕЛЬСТВА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ

50-летие Европейской экономической комиссии (ЕЭК ООН) отмечается на фоне политических и экономических перемен исторического значения. Именно Европа стала отправной точкой этих изменений и именно в Европе особенно видны их масштабность и глубина. Здесь, в Европе, закладываются и опробываются качественно новые принципы и структуры взаимодействия государств, которые оказывают серьезное воздействие на содержание и формы глобальных интеграционных процессов, будь то в западной части Европы, на пространстве Содружества Независимых Государств (СНГ), либо в Азиатско-тихоокеанском регионе (АТР) и на американском континенте.

Только что состоявшееся в рамках сессии ЕЭК представительное заседание "круглого стола" наглядно продемонстрировало широкий спектр, разноплановость и остроту стоящих перед нашими странами задач, в решении которых ЕЭК призвана сыграть свою весомую роль.

Меняющиеся геополитические и экономические реалии требуют серьезной корректировки деятельности всех международных организаций. Это в полной мере относится к ЕЭК ООН. Являясь во времена "холодной войны" единственным общеевропейским экономическим форумом, в посление 20 лет ЕЭК постепенно трансформировалась в часть обширной семьи международных организаций региона, деятельность которых все чаще соприкасается, а то и взаимопереплетается, затрагивая целый ряд общих для всех них аспектов международного взаимодействия.

Как справедливо отмечается в представленной на одобрение сессии Декларации об укреплении экономического сотрудничества в Европе, ЕЭК по праву завоевала высокий международный авторитет. Общепризнанные достижения Комиссии в нормотворческой деятельности в области охраны окружающей среды, транспорта, промышленности, энергетики, сельского хозяйства, статистики, экономического анализа и др., имеют не только региональное, но во многом и глобальное измерение. Эффективно используя свои сравнительные преимущества, Комиссия достаточно успешно адаптируется к меняющимся политическим и экономическим потребностям стран-членов. Нынешняя реформа ЕЭК - убедительное тому подтверждение.

Деятельность ЕЭК для России, находящейся на заключительном этапе перехода к рыночной экономике, имеет важное практическое значение. В частности, с помощью комиссии мы используем опыт других стран в качестве катализатора наших собственных преобразований, учитываем ее исследования, рекомендации при разработке национальной экономической политики, высоко ценим наше взаимодействие в обеспечении состыкованности российского законодательства и различного рода прикладных нормативов с европейским и общемировыми.

Мы убеждены, что деятельность Комиссии на обозримую перспективу должна фокусироваться на поддержке усилий стран переходного периода по интеграции в европейскую и мировую экономику с упором на развитие инвестиционного сотрудничества, малого и среднего предпринимательства, устранение искусственных препятствий в региональной торговле. Это отвечало бы интересам не только России, но и всех других стран - членов ЕЭК.

На наш взгляд, согласованные стратегические направления будущей деятельности ЕЭК адекватно и сбалансированно отражают широкий спектр приоритетов и потребностей стран - членов Комиссии, имеющих различный уровень социально-экономического развития. В то же время они составляют некий общий знаменатель, объединяющий интересы всех стран региона. Такое сочетание, на наш взгляд, отражает уникальные ключевые характеристики ЕЭК: универсальность и демократизм. В целом Россия приветствует меры по повышению эффективности деятельности ЕЭК, отраженные в Плане действий. Их реализация способна обеспечить большую оперативность и эффективность работы Комиссии и ее вспомогательных органов, серьезную экономию ограниченных ресурсов. Сейчас важно дать Комиссии возможность поработать в стабильном режиме, что даст возможность в полной мере раскрыть ее потенциал.

Мы убеждены в перспективности дальнейшего развития взаимодействия Комиссии с другими действующими в регионе экономическими организациями и интеграционными механизмами.

Среди успешных примеров подобного межучрежденческого взаимодействия - сотрудничество ЕЭК с ОБСЕ, подключение Комиссии к реализации Инициативы по развитию сотрудничества стран Юго-Восточной Европы (СЕКИ).

В этом контексте хотелось бы несколько подробнее остановиться на значительном, но пока еще не востребованном потенциале сотрудничества по линии ЕЭК СНГ.

Содружество Независимых Государств объединяет 12 республик бывшего СССР, все из которых являются членами ЕЭК. Сегодня - это одна из крупнейших в мире региональных группировок, охватывающая более двух пятых территории Евроазиатского континента с населением почти в 300 млн. человек. Здесь сосредоточены четверть мировых запасов основных видов природных ресурсов и десятая часть мирового промышленного потенциала. Важно, что к настоящему времени в большинстве стран приостановлено падение производства и, более того, преобладающей стала тенденция его роста.

В рамках Содружества - единое общее экономическое пространство с общим рынком товаров, услуг, капитала и рабочей силы. Учрежден постоянно действующий исполнительный и координирующий орган - Межгосударственный экономический комитет (МЭК). Я имею честь быть Председателем Президиума и Коллегии этого органа.

Процесс интеграции проходит в специфических условиях разноскоростного перехода национальных экономик на рыночные отношения. К настоящему времени в основном сформирована нормативно-правовая база, идет поиск и обработка наиболее эффективных направлений и форм сотрудничества.

Понятно, что для СНГ, отметившего недавно свое пятилетие, 50-летний опыт многостороннего сотрудничества в рамках ЕЭК представляет исключительный интерес. В то же время мы убеждены, что налаживание и развитие рабочего взаимодействия между ЕЭК и МЭК будет взаимообогащающим и пойдет на благо всех стран нашего региона.

Во время сегодняшней встречи с Исполнительным секретарем г-ном И. Бертело обсуждены конструктивные подходы, направления и формы сотрудничества между ЕЭК и МЭК. Нами переданы проекты меморандума о намерениях по рабочему взаимодействию и проект протокола об обмене информацией, открывающие широкие возможности для наших плодотворных отношений. Важным шагом в этом направлении призван стать визит в МЭК по нашему приглашению делегации ЕЭК во главе с Исполнительным секретарем.

Господин Председатель,

Один из важных резервов повышения эффективности Комиссии мы видим в более активном вовлечении частного бизнеса в ее деятельность. Первым шагом на этом направлении могла бы стать подготовка Секретариатом развернутых предложений о направлениях, формах и методах такого взаимодействия. Уверены, что хорошую пищу для размышлений в этом плане даст завтрашний "круглый стол" по проблематике расширения круга партнеров ЕЭК.

В заключение хотелось бы подтвердить нашу твердую поддержку Комиссии. Уверены, что она далеко не исчерпала свой потенциал и способна наращивать вклад в общеевропейскую интеграцию и развитие всех стран-членов.

STATEMENT BY MR. JÁN FOLTÍN, STATE SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF ECONOMY OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

First of all I would like to express my particular appreciation to the Executive Secretary and the secretariat for the excellent work done on the reform of the ECE since the establishment of the ad hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency and the last session of the Commission which was devoted to the reform of the ECE.

The reform was undertaken during the period of globalization of international economic relations, and enhanced the integration of the world economy. I would like to draw your attention particularly to the process of globalization of the production, economic integration, enhancement of the cooperation among countries, regions, integration groupings and continents. These processes are linked to the increased flows of foreign investment, to the setting up of new joint ventures and trade liberalization in the favourable multilateral climate set by WTO.

Slovakia actively participates in the international economic processes through bilateral and multilateral economic relations which are further promoted by its membership in WTO, the process of integration of Slovakia in the European Union, as well as the ongoing process of joining the OECD.

A qualitatively new period of the economic transition of Slovakia emerged after the achievement of macroeconomic stabilization in 1994-1995, which was accompanied by the creation of the institutional framework of market economy which allows us to proceed with restructuring of the economy, the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, transformation of the industrial base and agriculture, improvement of infrastructure and the completion of the privatization of the banking sector.

The performance of the Slovak economy further improved in 1996 achieving the best results in the region in terms of GDP growth and inflation rate. At the end of last year the inflation rate decreased to only 5.4% which is the lowest level among transition countries of central and eastern Europe. The unemployment rate decreased to 12%. Official reserves of the National Bank reached 3.5 billion USD in 1996, representing an equivalent of 4 months imports. The Slovak authorities expect a 6% growth in GDP, an inflation rate below 6% and an unemployment rate of 12% this year. Detailed written information about the Slovak economy is available in the room for anybody who is interested.

On behalf of the Slovak delegation I would like to highlight the importance of the role of the Economic Commission for Europe for the further development of our continent and in particular for the prospects of the central European region. The activities of the ECE are positively influenced by their transatlantic dimension. Slovakia highly appreciates the independent economic analyses which reflect perfect knowledge of problems of the ECE region.

We attach great importance to the activities of the ECE and our participation in the work of the organization. In this respect we would like to join the statements of previous speakers who appreciated the contribution of the CEFTA countries and especially their willingness to transmit their valuable experience in economic transformation to other countries in transition. In order to eliminate duplication in our work and to streamline common activities, we are of the opinion that an intensive and coordinated cooperation of ECE with OSCE, Council of Europe, WTO, UNCTAD and ITC is required.

Slovakia has a great interest in cooperating closely within the framework of the ECE, especially in its priority areas. One such area is environment which is intertwined with the transformation of economies, and in particular with the energy and industry sectors. In this connection I would like to inform you that efforts have already been undertaken in the field of transboundary air pollution, which is of primary importance for the Slovak authorities. Slovakia gives its full support to the preparatory process of the Regional Conference on Transport and Environment, to be held in Vienna in November this year.

The development of a coherent international transport network is one of the important goals set by the ECE. The reform process of the ECE in the transport area ensures that its new form will respond to the needs and demands of the member countries. We fully support its full implementation. Slovakia highly values the work of the Inland Transport Committee aimed at the unification of the European transport infrastructure and legislation in which Slovak experts actively participate.

We highly praise the supplementary allocation of resources for the ECE "Regional Advisory Services" especially in the field of facilitation of trade and implementation of EDIFACT. The establishment of the Centre for Procedures and Practices for Facilitation of Administration, Commerce and Transport (CEFACT) is a further step towards developing trade facilitation within the framework of ECE.

Slovakia highly appreciates the sustaining of several activities within ECE in the areas of energy and industry. We support especially the ECE activities in the field of metallurgy and the chemical industry, which are pillars of our economy.

The reform of the ECE clearly shows the path to be followed during the process of internal changes in other organizations of the UN system in the economic and social areas, such as ECOSOC. Slovakia fully supports the initiative of the European Union to undertake effective reform in these areas. To this end, Slovakia is ready to cooperate closely with the EU and other member countries.

Slovakia appreciates the personal contribution of the Executive Secretary, Mr. Yves Berthelot, and the activities of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Strategic Directions and Efficiency. They both contributed to improvement of the financial and personnel situation in the ECE through the effective use of resources and the definition of priorities adapted to the needs and demands of all member countries. We also highly value the political will of all countries which contributed to the discussion on future strategic priorities, the enhancement of the efficiency of the work of the Commission and the achievement of corresponding savings. I am confident that our deliberations at the 52nd session will help us to achieve the successful implementation of the reform process in accordance with the Declaration on the strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe and Plan of Action.

STATEMENT BY MR. MARJAN SENJUR, MINISTER FOR ECONOMIC RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SLOVENIA

This Jubilee Session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe is a special tribute to the past decades of efforts and achievements in Europe.

The ECE has shown vitality and is now at a crossroads. It is facing new challenges in Europe. In order to meet these challenges it is inevitable that the ECE should need to change its structure and methods of work, but also to define new major areas of work and activities.

I would like to pay tribute to the Executive Secretary and the many experts involved in coming up with the "Plan of Action", which is a good basis for future work of the ECE. Every member country can easily subscribe to greater flexibility, efficiency and focused work. Change is needed, as was stated by many delegations.

On this occasion I would like to raise a few issues which may need discussion and which support the need for change of ECE.

First, a new positioning of ECE in Europe is needed. There is no doubt that there is a need for a regional UN economic commission for Europe. However, the situation in Europe has changed since 1947. There are now in Europe quite a lot of regional and subregional institutions and organizations dealing with economic issues. Besides the UN Economic Commission for Europe, there are also OECD, EBRD and many research institutes. The World Bank is also active in Europe.

ECE needs to find a place among these organizations and institutions. There is not just a question of complementarity among these as mentioned in the Plan of Action, but also the question of competition between several institutions.

Second, an issue which I think needs consideration is the role of UN/ECE in integration processes in Europe. There is on the Agenda of this meeting the adoption of the Declaration on the strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe, which reveals the need to be active in this field.

In Europe, there is now much discussion and action about the deepening and enlargement of the EU. Some European countries, as for example Slovenia, are very active in preparations for accession to the EU. There is EFTA. There is also the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and a lot of activities in this regard. There are also many other economic cooperation initiatives in Europe. ECE will have to adjust and be flexible in order to be part and perhaps even facilitator of these many cooperation activities in Europe.

Third, it is also very important to define the areas of work in which the ECE has clear advantages. It is not just a question of how, but also of what.

The Plan of Action defines the areas of work. I agree that statistics, economic analyses, environment and so on are important areas of work. What I am missing in the Plan of Action is the subject of economic development.

With enormous changes in eastern, central and southern Europe, less developed countries appeared. There are now countries in Europe with a per capita income below US$ 2000. In the European context, the average income per capita for EU countries is around US$ 20,000. This may affect cohesion in Europe. I think that the issues of economic development in Europe need more attention. Perhaps ECE could play a greater role in this regard along with UNCTAD and UNDP.

Fourth, the Plan of Action focuses its attention on the subregion in Europe of so-called countries in transition. This is justified since the UN agencies were not sufficiently present in this area in past years. However, I would suggest that even more attention should be paid to those transition countries in Europe which are less developed. Perhaps the issue of assistance to them should be placed on the future agenda for discussion.

Some less developed European countries do not face just political problems, but also economic problems, which have roots in much lower development.

My Government has full confidence in the role of the Commission and the work of its bodies. I hope that it will find a proper place in the changing and competitive environment in Europe.

DECLARATION DE MONSIEUR FRANZ BLANKART, SECRETAIRE D'ETAT DE LA SUISSE

Quelques années à peine après sa création en 1947, la Commission économique pour l'Europe des Nations Unies a vu son rôle être redéfini par la naissance, puis par le développement et la persistance de ce que l'on a ensuite appelé la guerre froide. Ses activités, entravées, en ont bien évidemment souffert et la Commission a été transformée en une plateforme de dialogue technique entre deux systèmes économiques opposés, fondés sur des idéologies antagonistes.

Durant la majeure partie de son existence, la CEE/ONU s'est ainsi cantonnée dans un rôle de vecteur de l'intégration technique des économies de ses Etats membres puisque les activités de nature politique ne faisaient, par définition, pas l'unanimité. Je m'en voudrais d'ailleurs de ne pas mentionner le fait que la CEE/ONU est longtemps restée la seule enceinte internationale où un dialogue économique entre l'Est et l'Ouest du continent a pu exister. Que ce soit dans les domaines du transport, des statistiques ou de la facilitation des échanges, le secrétariat de la Commission a ainsi développé des connaissances remarquables en matière d'harmonisation des normes et des standards, qui lui permettent aujourd'hui de faire figure de "leader" mondial dans certaines de ses questions. En outre, les publications économiques de la CEE/ONU ont démontré que la Commission dispose de capacités analytiques remarquables.

Dans cette perspective, je souhaite saluer l'effort qu'a consenti la CEE/ONU depuis la dernière session annuelle. Les travaux du Groupe spécial sur les orientations stratégiques ont, sous la direction efficace de l'Ambassadeur Willems, pu aboutir à un résultat - le Plan d'action que nous adopterons demain matin - qui justifie à la fois les efforts des Etats membres de la Commission et les espoirs placés par nous tous dans l'avenir de l'institution.

En effet, la nouvelle structure de la CEE/ONU de même que ses nouvelles méthodes de travail, contribueront grandement à améliorer la qualité de ses travaux ainsi que son efficacité. Cet argument ne doit pas être pris à la légère: il convient de rappeler que la réforme de notre Commission est à placer dans le cadre global des efforts de rationalisation entrepris par l'Organisation des Nations Unies dans son ensemble. Par l'adoption de ce plan de réforme, c'est donc également un nouveau signal politique, positif et très clair, que nous enverrons demain au siège des Nations Unies à New York.

Finalement, je souhaiterais vous faire part de quelques souhaits, ou plutôt d'un espoir, que la Suisse place dans la mise en oeuvre de cette réforme. Cet espoir serait que la Commission continue de renforcer sa coopération d'une part avec les autres organisations économiques internationales actives en Europe, notamment l'OSCE, et d'autre part avec les représentants du secteur privé. Si la CEE/ONU parvenait à jouer un rôle déterminant en matière de coordination entre les différentes composantes institutionnelles coexistant à l'heure actuelle en Europe dans le domaine économique, comme c'est déjà le cas dans le domaine des statistiques, un pas énorme serait franchi en matière de coopération européenne. La CEE/ONU, de par sa composition, de par ses compétences, et avec l'espoir que nous tous plaçons en elle, mérite amplement les efforts que nous avons consentis pour assurer sa réforme.

ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЕ Г-НА РАХМАТУЛЛАЕВА Э.Р., ПЕРВОГО ЗАМЕСТИТЕЛЯ МИНИСТРА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ДЕЛ РЕСПУБЛИКИ ТАДЖИКИСТАН

Мне доставляет огромное удовольствие передать всем вам искренние и сердечные поздравления в связи с полувековым юбилеем Европейской экономической комиссии Организации Объединенных Наций. Особые поздравления мы хотели бы адресовать Секретариату Комиссии, Исполнительному секретарю г-ну Иву Бертело, приложившим немало усилий для эффективного налаживания успешного сотрудничества между государствами-членами.

За период своего существования Комиссия показала себя международным инструментом, без которого сегодня все мы едва ли имели бы в поле зрения реальную перспективу равноправного общеевропейского сотрудничества. В первые послевоенные годы ЕЭК занялась решением проблем жилья и в разрушенной Европе. Когда политический холод развел страны-участницы в противостоящие друг другу блоки, Комиссия чутко отреагировала на создание предпосылок для общеевропейского сотрудничества и стала основным органом для выполнения решений экономической "корзины" Совещания по безопасности и сотрудничеству в Европе. Как только "холодная война" прекратилась и опасность мировой катастрофы отодвинулась на второй план, Комиссия поставила на центральное место вопросы оказания содействия странам с переходной экономикой в создании рыночных институтов, развитии деловых контактов и сотрудничества в масштабах всего региона. Этот внушительный перечень свидетельствует о том, что ЕЭК ООН занимает прочное место в истории Европы и всего мира. Она эффективно помогает созданию сегодняшнего мира и заслуживает нашей признательности и благодарности.

За 50 лет Комиссия приобрела огромный опыт налаживания сотрудничества и наработала много международных документов, которые позволили странам-участницам активно включаться в международное сотрудничество. Экономический обзор Европы заслуженно стал одним из научных изданий, стимулирующим профессиональные дискуссии по вопросам экономического развития. Статистические публикации Комиссии являются первоклассными материалами, используемыми национальными исследованиями многих стран. Конвенции по конкретным вопросам организации транспорта, торговли, охраны окружающей среды позволяют сегодня готовиться к решению проблем завтрашнего дня. Стандарты Комиссии помогают странам эффективно сотрудничать друг с другом.

Однако следует отметить, что не все продукты творческой работы Комиссии дошли до всех стран - участниц ЕЭК. Таджикистан, например, еще не в полной мере знаком с ними. Вероятно, аналогичная ситуация существует и в ряде других стран региона.

К чести Комиссии и ее руководства я хотел бы отметить ее постоянную готовность учитывать в содержании и методах своей работы изменения, происходящие в международной атмосфере. Это качество Комиссии проявилось и в последнее время, когда акцент в ее работе был перенесен на вопросы содействия рыночным преобразованиям в странах с переходной экономикой. Особо значимым событием в этой связи наряду с организацией рабочих совещаний и семинаров по проблематике переходных процессов явилось создание Службы региональных советников. Эти эксперты, в частности, помогают Таджикистану познакомить наших специалистов с нормами, стандартами и конвенциями, разработанными в Комиссии, а также содействуют привлечению в нашу страну иностранных инвестиций. Мы особенно благодарны Региональным советникам Комиссии за содействие в создании электронного Представительства Таджикистана на Интернете и за содействие в разработке проекта "Руководства для иностранных инвесторов в Таджикистане". Мы надеемся, что программа сфокусированной консультативной помощи Таджикистану будет выполнена в полном объеме. Мы согласны с мнением секретариата Комиссии о том, что направление Региональных советников требуется подкрепить внебюджетными ресурсами, и надеемся, что страны-доноры найдут возможность сделать это.

В настоящее время Таджикистан в тесном взаимодействии с Организацией Объединенных Наций, ОБСЕ и другими международными организациями существенно продвинулся в решении известных политических проблем внутри и вокруг страны. Теперь важно подкрепить этот успех и в плане экономическом. В этом аспекте мы рассчитываем на активное содействие ЕЭК.

Республика Таджикистан поддерживает инициативу Казахстана о создании Специальной программы ЕЭК и ЭСКАТО при поддержке ПРООН для стран Центральной Азии и рассчитывает на ощутимый вклад этой Программы в развитие центрально-азиатского сотрудничества и в решение национальных задач по переходу к рыночной экономике и интеграции в мировые хозяйственные связи. Надеемся, что страны-доноры и международные финансовые организации окажут поддержку этой Программе.

В настоящее время Европейская экономическая комиссия является хорошо настроенным инструментом взаимодействия стран Большой Европы, простирающейся сегодня от Атлантики до Тихого океана. На пороге второго тысячелетия мы приветствуем Декларацию ЕЭК об укреплении экономического сотрудничества в Европе. Пусть этот документ поможет Комиссии умножить усилия по развитию экономического сотрудничества между всеми ее странами-членами.

STATEMENT BY MR. LJUBOMIR DANAILOV FRCKOSKI, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

At the outset, allow me to express my great pleasure and honour of having the opportunity on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, to address this significant jubilee - the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. I would like to thank the Bureau for its tireless efforts during the process of definition of the future priorities of the Commission. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Executive Secretary, Yves Berthelot, as well as the ECE secretariat, and to express our appreciation and satisfaction with the excellent results of their work.

During fifty years the UN/ECE has been timely and continuously adapting itself to the changes in the region and has directed its activities to achieving goals which were the most appropriate for its member States. After each process of transformation, the Commission emerged stronger. This is one of the reasons why the Economic Commission for Europe is considered to be the most successful regional economic commission in the UN system. Its activities in the areas of harmonization of rules, norms and standards have created conditions for development of cooperation, not only among the member States, but have also been applied on a global level.

The Declaration and the Plan of Action, which I hope will be adopted today by acclamation, define the strategic directions of the Commission's future activities and make its structure more flexible, enabling it to be more efficient in fulfilling the needs of the member States and changing realities in the region. In that respect, the Economic Commission for Europe contributes to the efforts of the entire international community in the direction of redefining the role and programmes of the United Nations. I believe that this will contribute to making the whole UN system stronger and more efficient.

The Republic of Macedonia is strongly committed to building an economy based on entrepreneurship and market principles. The creation of an open market economy is the basis of our economic reforms. In that respect, the process of privatization is expected to be completed by the end of this year. We expect foreign trade to reach a level higher than half of the gross domestic product. We are aware that the economic prosperity of my country depends on the success of the market reforms and on growing participation in international trade.

Through implementation of such an economic policy so far, we have successfully created macroeconomic balance and stability, which are evident in particular in the monetary sphere. We have succeeded, in spite of the extremely complex environment, to curb inflation and at the same time to maintain the stability of our national currency - the denar. Our priority in the near future is to revitalize investment activities. To achieve this aim, attracting foreign direct investment is of great significance.

With regard to foreign policy, the Republic of Macedonia follows the principle of leading a consistent peaceful policy. My country successfully maintains its politics of equidistance towards its neighbours and is making great efforts to develop mutual cooperation, especially with countries from the region. In this general foreign policy framework, foreign economic relations have a significant role to play.

Relations with the European Union are our priority, due to our permanent commitment to become a part of a developed Europe. We expect the signing of the already initialled Agreement for Cooperation with the European Union to take place in the near future. This Agreement will be a sound basis in our further negotiations for realization of our final goal - membership in the European Union.

Last April we signed a Declaration for Cooperation with the EFTA Governments, while in November the first meeting of the Joint Committee was held, when a subcommittee was established, and we are further working towards reaching an agreement for free trade.

We pay special attention to our participation and work in regional organizations and initiatives for integration in Europe. My country is an active member of the Central European Initiative, whose credibility is constantly increasing. The Republic of Macedonia is among the first countries to have given full support to the South-east European Cooperative Initiative. From the very beginning of the Royaumont process, The Republic of Macedonia has actively participated in its work. The role which the Commission has in the South-east European Cooperative Initiative is of great significance and is a good indicator of its flexibility to meet the indicated needs of the region. We hosted the 5th Conference of the Royaumont Process held on 8 April this year. These and other such initiatives have exactly the same aim - development of mutual trust, increasing security and enhancing cooperation.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to point out the confidence of my Government that the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, with its Declaration and Plan of Action, which we expect to be adopted today, will become even more efficient and be a positive example for successful transformation of the UN system.

STATEMENT BY MR. TUGAY ULUÇEVIK, AMBASSADOR,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF TURKEY

I consider myself as privileged to represent my Government at this Jubilee Session of the UN Economic Commission for Europe marking the 50th anniversary of its foundation.

May I hasten, Mr. Chairman, to express my pleasure at seeing a distinguished Minister from Hungary, a country with which Turkey traditionally enjoys friendly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation, presiding over this historic session. We are confident that under your wise and able guidance our deliberations will come to a successful conclusion befitting the importance of this memorable event.

May I also be allowed, Mr. Chairman, to fulfil a pleasant duty to read our the cable message addressed to the Distinguished Executive Secretary by Prof. Dr. Tansu Çiller, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey on this auspicious occasion.

"Dear Mr. Executive Secretary,

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, I have the pleasure to convey to you my Government's most sincere congratulations and best wishes for the future of the Commission.

As one of its founding members, Turkey highly values the past and future contributions of the Commission to European integration, peace and stability as well as its role in our joint efforts to design the architecture of Europe for the next century.

As has been hitherto, Turkey will continue to support the Commission for the achievement of its objectives and be ready for enhanced cooperation.

Please accept, Mr. Executive Secretary, the assurances of my highest consideration."

The existence of the UN Economic Commission for Europe is the evidence of the fact that Europe is the name of a conceptual space far transcending the geographical borders defined for the European continent itself. For more than four decades ECE served as a platform of cooperation for countries of different political, economic and social systems. Today ECE symbolizes the emergence of a new Europe. It embraces 55 countries from North America to Central Asia which in recognition of their common economic interests have embarked on a peaceful integration based on pluralist democracy, supremacy of law, human rights as well as market economy and free enterprise.

It would not be correct to assert that all the 55 countries of the ECE enjoy the same level of prosperity and development. Moreover, their cultural identities, languages and beliefs may be different. However, we should see our diversity as a richness.

One of the biggest challenges facing Europe at the turn of this century will be to prove its ability to convert this diversity into dynamism and comparative advantages for growth, development and prosperity for all. ECE has an important role to play in this respect as well as in bringing about a Europe free from breaklines.

Turkey attributes importance to and contributes actively in the reform process for the ECE. We believe that its continued relevance and existence at a time when the UN as a whole is going through a difficult period and also drastic changes in the European institutional landscape are taking place, depends on its ability to display a vision for the next century and to ensure focus, flexibility and efficiency in its activities. Turkey believes that the reform package will not only give a new impetus to ECE in this regard, but will also better equip the organization to contribute to the attainment of sustainable development as one of the major goals of the UN. We hope that the Plan of Action may enable this organization to bridge the gaps between its subregions and forge new partnerships in the economic field.

Turkey considers ECE's interaction and cooperation with other organizations, institutions as well as subregional groupings as useful and believes that a sound division of labour based on complementarity is necessary for efficient use of its resources.

One of the subregional groupings which collaborates with the ECE is the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. As the initiator and current chairman of this grouping, Turkey hopes for an enhanced interaction between these two organizations.

ECE is a comprehensive multilateral forum where member countries discuss and analyse their common problems and work out convergent and harmonious policies for their solution in the areas as defined in the Plan of Action. We see the normative functions of the ECE to develop conventions, norms and standards as important and as being instrumental in fostering economic integration in Europe. We hope that sufficient means will be allocated to ensure their continuation. Turkey is confident that the activities to be redefined in line with the Plan of Action will add value to the general UN development effort.

The Regional Advisory services are generally looked upon as the ECE's operational arm. We therefore consider them as important and necessary since they provide backstopping to ECE's normative functions.

For the international organizations to be viable they must be able to address successfully common problems encountered by their membership. If the remedies offered by them make a visible impact in tackling these problems, the interest and support of the member countries could be sustained. During the implementation phase of the Plan of Action, both the secretariat and the member Governments should share a sense of responsibility to work harder with a view to rendering this organization more visible.

Before concluding my statement, I wish to commend on this felicitous occasion the distinguished Executive Secretary, Mr. Yves Berthelot and his predecessors as well as the staff of the ECE. Without their devoted work and much appreciated efforts ECE could not possibly have achieved what it stands for today. They deserve our continued support.

STATEMENT BY MR. VOLODYMYR D. KHANDOGY,
DEPUTY MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF UKRAINE

An important step leading the European region into the coming century is being made today. For half a century the Economic Commission for Europe has played a unique role in promoting European cooperation in various fields. But it is the desire to place the ECE in the new context created by the adherence of the whole region to the market economy system and democracy that has called forth the efforts of member States and the ECE secretariat in restructuring the Commission's activities.

The delegation of Ukraine fully shares the thought expressed yesterday in the introductory statement of the distinguished Executive Secretary of the ECE, Mr. Yves Berthelot, I quote: "the Commission can take pride in its past. However, in a world of constant transformation this past does not constitute a guarantee for the future".

While promoting, together with other member States, the initiative on reforming the Commission, Ukraine proceeded from the necessity to enhance the Commission's efficiency, adapt it to the new realities of today and strengthen the role of the ECE as a unique body dealing with pan-European and transatlantic cooperation in the economic field.

The process of consultations at different levels on strategic directions of future activities of the Commission, its organizational structure and programme of work, which has lasted for almost two years, is about to be completed by the adoption of the Declaration and Plan of Action. I believe that we all have reason to be satisfied with the final outcome of this process which was not at all painless and easy.

I think it is obvious that the Plan of Action has resulted from a compromise of interests, sometimes rather different, of member countries. It may not fully meet our expectations. I mean, in particular, the provisions of the Plan of Action that envisage a considerable cut in the activities of the Commission, first of all, in the energy and industry fields. These areas are of vital importance for Ukraine, which is carrying out the second stage of economic reform - that of structural reconstruction of the economy.

However, fully understanding the need to cope with the shrinking resource base arising from the cash-flow crisis experienced by the UN, my delegation would like to emphasize that much depends on the implementation process and the ability of member States and the secretariat to stick to the adopted documents.

We expect that in the process of translating into practice the basic principles of the future activities of the Commission stipulated in the Plan of Action, the requirements of all the groups of countries in the ECE region will be taken into account, priority being given to the needs of economies in transition, accelerating their economic reforms and their integration into the European and global economy.

In our opinion, the provisions of the Plan of Action concerning the establishment of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development and groups of experts on steel and chemicals in its framework, as well as reorganization of the intergovernmental mechanism in the energy sector, should be fully utilized for further development of these important directions of the Commission's activities.

We also support the establishment of the Coordinating Unit for Operational Activities which is vital in avoiding duplication and ensuring that reform within the organization is an integrated and coherent exercise. We would like to stress that the scope of the Unit's tasks, especially those connected with coordination of operational activities of the secretariat's divisions and regional advisers for the countries in transition, requires strengthening of its resource base.

My delegation would like to express its doubts regarding the advisability of biennialization of the sessions of the Commission. We are not convinced of the practical and even financial advantages of such changes which could only further formalize the role of the sessions and weaken the influence of the governments of member countries on the activities of the Commission.

I would also like to stress that if adopted such an option would lead to an unjustified and unconstitutional change in the role and authority of the ad hoc informal meetings established by decision P (45), which would practically substitute for the ECE regular sessions.

The feasibility and indeed usefulness of a fully-fledged session of the ECE are obvious to us especially at a time when the Commission commences practical implementation of the Plan of Action and enters a period of substantial and profound reorganization of its activities, which is expected to be neither easy nor painless, and will require a more focused and permanent attention on the part of member States.

In conclusion the delegation of Ukraine would like to express confidence that the Commission will emerge from this reform process strengthened and better equipped to serve as an important instrument for dialogue and cooperation in Europe.

STATEMENT BY MS. LESLIE GERSON, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES a.i.,
UNITED STATES MISSION

It is with great pleasure that the United States is participating in this Jubilee Session of the Economic Commission for Europe. On behalf of my Government, I would like to express our appreciation to the Chairman, the Executive Secretary, and to the secretariat for the fine preparations for this meeting.

The economic ties that unite the United States and Europe are strong and vibrant. In fact, the US-European economic relationship is the largest in the world, with two-way trade of over USD 300 billion and total stock of investment of over USD 700 billion. In troubled years of the past, the ECE provided a bridge between the free market economies of the west and the centrally planned economies of the east. Today, with open markets accepted throughout the region, the ECE stands ready to encourage cooperative economic development and assist less well-off members with their integration into the global economy.

Fifty years ago, when members met for the first session of the Commission, the US delegation noted that the ECE was formed "to promote the most effective employment of the human and national resources of Europe, for the benefit of all". Success, in turn, would be measured by the ECE's ability to help find prompt solutions to the urgent problems facing Europe in its recovery from World War II.

And succeed it has. From its early years when it helped implement the Marshall Plan, the ECE has grown to play a significant role in all the major European and transatlantic economic themes of our times. Its activities have ranged from enhancing economic cooperation to implementing important environmental conventions to improving transportation infrastructures. The ECE has helped set important standards for agricultural products and motor vehicles, pointed the way for more efficient use of energy resources, and has been an important source of economic and statistical data.

But the ECE is not an institution rooted in the past, nor has its longevity prevented the ECE from adapting to change. When rapid geopolitical developments of the last decade raised new questions about the mandate of this commission, the ECE demonstrated its ability to renew itself and redefine its mission.

This ability to evolve was more recently demonstrated several months ago when, under the able leadership of Executive Secretary Berthelot, the ECE launched a reform exercise aimed at setting goals and priorities for the next century and for adjusting resource use to reflect future directions and current global financial realities. This ambitious effort was not without its difficult moments. In addition to differences of opinion about the scope and direction of change, the relative merits of many programmes were often debated. In the end, however, what emerged was a process notable for its spirit of cooperation and its commitment to getting results.

The secretariat provided useful data on work elements, budgets and staffing and responded to a range of requests from members for other information. Members, in turn, worked together to identify priorities and assess the Commission's relative strengths. All members participated as full partners in this exercise and each contributed to the success of the final restructuring plan.

At the same time, this was notably an open process. The Chairman and the Executive Secretary made every effort to stimulate frank discussions. Input from all members was encouraged and delegations consulted among themselves on evolving positions. In the end, we crafted the reform package we hope to adopt during this annual session, one that may not give every nation everything it wanted but certainly one that addresses the high priority needs of member States.

A year ago, our task of initiating reform and setting priorities for the ECE acceptable to all members seemed a formidable task. Today, we are ready to adopt this package as we celebrate the ECE's 50th birthday. In that sense, the ECE reflects a unique potential of the UN as a whole: the potential not always realized of finding a realistic solution through open and honest dialogue despite often strongly held differences of opinion and focus.

While my Government is pleased with the progress on ECE reform, we by no means believe that this represents the end point of our efforts. All of us understand that reform is a dynamic process, and this recent exercise has heightened this awareness. The consultative mechanism that has been proposed in the Plan of Action, coupled with a desire for flexibility and openness, should permit member States and the secretariat to engage in an ongoing review of ways to improve further the ECE's work programmes and operations, its governance, and its cost-effectiveness.

We believe that the new reform package will give members and the secretariat alike a new and effective tool for responding quickly and efficiently to the changing needs of members. This should include accepting new ideas, dropping outmoded ones, enhancing cooperation with other institutions, and finding balance between the different needs of ECE members. All of this, of course, has to be done in an environment of significant resource constraints. It may sound like a daunting task, but members have amply demonstrated in the past their commitment to the success of the Commission's work. We will do no less in the next century, as the region - and this institution - continue to evolve.

Just as our predecessors in the aftermath of World War II acted to create a new institutional framework, our generation is looking forward to the challenges of a new century and a new age. We, the member States, must take the spirit that has guided our discussions these past months - the spirit of reform and renewal - and make it part of our ongoing endeavours within the ECE. Indeed, our governments must work together to engender this same spirit throughout the UN system - to promote an ongoing commitment that all parts of the United Nations engage in constant renewal, for only by adapting and changing can the United Nations respond effectively to the needs of its members and the challenges of a new century.

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION BY VASCO RAMOS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Allow me to join the Presidency of the European Union in congratulating the ECE on its many achievements during the last 50 years.

We are looking forward with optimism to the role it can continue to play in the future. The Declaration to be adopted today and the Plan of Action which the Executive Secretary is now implementing will ensure that ECE can fulfil this role effectively and efficiently. I would like to join all those who have congratulated the outgoing Bureau - and particularly Ambassador Willems - and the Executive Secretary and his staff on their work. I wish the new Bureau every success in the implementation phase of these changes.

The evolution of the transition process, which is our major preoccupation in this forum, is inevitably uneven. Nevertheless, there are signs of consolidation of progress already achieved in many parts of the ECE region.

In the European Union, economic activity accelerated during 1996. Against this positive background, convergence is also expected to improve: the expectation is for a significant number of Member States to meet the necessary conditions to participate in Economic and Monetary Union from the outset. Fulfilment of convergence criteria will be assessed at the beginning of 1998 on the basis of the performance in 1997. The major challenge for EU economic policy in the coming years is employment creation against the background of budgetary consolidation and convergence. Fiscal restraint and the requirements for participation in EMU could represent a constraint for solving the unemployment problem, but this will not be so if economic policy can produce a stable macro-economic environment which is favourable to growth.

The European Union has, furthermore, continued its large scale political, economic and technical support for the European countries in transition. With the countries of central and eastern Europe, our relations are based on the Association Agreements concluded some years ago. These agreements lead to far-reaching integration with the EU in areas such as industrial free trade, service industries, competition policy, approximation of legislation and economic cooperation. They also provide for political dialogue, financial support and cultural cooperation.

Following the decisions of the Copenhagen and Essen European Councils, our efforts have turned towards implementing the pre-accession strategy for the 10 countries who have applied for membership of the EU. This involves their progressive integration into the internal market of the EU. Key elements are the harmonization of their legislation with that of the EU, the reorientation of the PHARE programme as the financial instrument of the strategy - and thus away from its former demand-driven approach, the structured dialogue on issues of common interest and the on-going implementation of the full provisions of the Association Agreements. The Commission is drawing up Opinions on the preparedness of each of the candidate countries to assume the obligations of EU membership. These will be sent to the Council after the conclusion of the Intergovernmental Conference later this year and will be the basis for the decisions to be taken.

The EU is by far the greatest source of assistance to the countries of central and eastern Europe and coordinates western aid in the G 24. The EU share amounts to some 70% of all aid, excluding the international financial institutions. The PHARE Programme is the primary instrument of this assistance. PHARE now devotes 25% of its funds to cross-border cooperation and the cofinancing of infrastructure.

In south east Europe, the EU has adopted a regional approach to developing bilateral relations with the countries not yet having Association Agreements with the EU - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. This is intended to provide a strong incentive for stability and cooperation among these countries and the EU is envisaging well beyond 1 billion ECU in support and reconstruction assistance to the countries of former Yugoslavia up to 1999. Most of this is expected to be used in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in areas such as institution building, reconstruction and refugee return and economic development.

The EU will be contributing substantially to efforts to assist Albania in its current crisis. The Commission is currently examining how best to assist Albania in areas such as humanitarian and food aid, institutions and infrastructure, including border crossings and macro-financial assistance, to be provided within the international coordination framework. We already have a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Albania, since 1992, which contains evolutionary provisions. The existing PHARE programme, with necessary reorientations, provides a basis for technical assistance, with some 212 mecu available up to 1999.

A Preferential Cooperation Agreement has been initialled with The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and is expected to enter into force shortly.

Our economic relations with the New Independent States are based on trade policy, assistance and foreign direct investment and the EU is their most important customer and supplier. It also provides the largest share of assistance to the NIS and foreign direct investment originating in the EU represents an important part of overall capital inflows.

The EU has signed Partnership and Cooperation agreements with ten NIS. As soon as they enter into force, they will boost existing links and grant NIS exports even better access to EU markets. Although these agreements are diverse, reflecting the differences between the partner countries, each establishes a strong and comprehensive political and economic partnership covering trade and related issues and including a political dialogue. They are based

on shared principles and objectives: respect for the rule of law and human rights, the development of political freedoms and the establishment of a functioning market economy and aim to support the integration of the NIS into the world economy.

EU and member State assistance to the NIS amounts to about 73 billion ECU - around 60% of all western aid - up to 1995. It has, in particular, been significant in areas such as food aid, export credits, strategic aid and technical assistance - through the TACIS programme. Key areas of TACIS assistance include restructuring of State enterprises and private sector development - including the banking system, building an effective food production, processing and distribution system, developing energy, transport and telecommunications infrastructures, nuclear safety, environment, public administration reform, social services and education. To the end of 1996, TACIS has committed about over 2.8 billion ECU to launch more than 2500 projects.

With the countries of the European Economic Area, EU relations are based on the four freedoms of the EU Single Market - free movement of goods, services, capital and people. Work on the application of EU internal legislation to the EEA has continued apace and the backlog has been virtually eliminated. Flanking policies on environmental protection, social policy and consumer protection were also agreed.

The EU continues to underline the importance it attaches to strengthening ties with Switzerland and concluding negotiations on transport, free movement of persons, agriculture, research, mutual recognition of conformity assessment and public procurement, as soon as possible.

Our relations with Mediterranean countries have continued within the framework of the Barcelona process, whose second Ministerial conference has just taken place. Cooperation with our Mediterranean partners continues within the MEDA programme, under which over 400 MECU was committed in 1996. Specifically, with Cyprus, the EU continues to pursue the pre-Accession strategy and the associated structured dialogue is developing well. With the new Maltese Government, we are discussing new arrangements for cooperation. With Turkey, following the entry into force of the EU/Turkey Customs Union at the end of 1995, the institutional arrangements began operation. A free-trade agreement on coal and steel products came into effect on 1 August 1996.

In concluding, I would like to pay tribute to the work of the secretariat during the past year. A special mention is due to the contribution that it has again made to the OSCE economic dimension - in particular with its professional input to the Economic Forum and to the Review Meeting which prepared the Lisbon Summit last December. We look forward to their contribution to the Economic Forum in June and to cooperating with them for the Forum.

DECLARATION DE MONSEIGNEUR CELESTINO MIGLIORE, SOUS-SECRETAIRE DU SAINT-SIEGE POUR LES RELATIONS AVEC LES ETATS

C'est bien volontiers que ma délégation s'associe à tous ceux qui se félicitent des succès obtenus par la Commission économique des Nations Unies pour l'Europe.

Le projet de Déclaration finale de cette session fait état, à juste titre, des progrès réalisés par l'instauration de gouvernements démocratiques et d'économies de marché, signes d'une large adhésion aux valeurs de la dignité humaine, de la libre initiative et des droits de tous les citoyens. Les divers aspects de la conjoncture ne nous permettent cependant pas de nous complaire dans les louanges et ils raniment constamment le débat pour rechercher les moyens de consolider le progrès économique et politique, en le fondant sur des valeurs capables de promouvoir une intégration plus forte du continent européen et de tous ses peuples.

Nous pouvons regarder un instant, avec fierté et satisfaction, mais aussi avec réalisme et le sentiment que l'oeuvre reste inachevée, le chemin parcouru pendant un demi-siècle important dans l'histoire de notre continent. Mais la commémoration de ce jour nous invite plutôt à porter notre regard vers le prochain de l'histoire de l'Europe et à esquisser un programme réaliste et efficace pour les travaux de la Commission.

L'Europe cherche à réaliser son unité dans le respect de sa diversité. En effet, le projet européen, outre des aspirations de liberté dans la démocratie et l'économie de marché, comporte des exigences de solidarité, telles que l'économie sociale de marché ou la protection sociale, et des exigences de subsidiarité.

Le régionalisme ouvert, que promeut la Commission économique pour l'Europe des Nations Unies, remplit un rôle important, parce qu'il favorise l'insertion plus dynamique des aires régionales dans l'économie mondiale, éloignant le risque d'une certaine mondialisation économique tendant à réaliser l'unité par l'uniformité.

La CEE/ONU oeuvre en faveur d'un développement durable, en tenant compte des contraintes écologiques et de la protection de l'environnement. La société occidentale est aujourd'hui plus sensible à la dégradation de l'environnement naturel qu'à la dégradation de l'environnement social, l'une et l'autre engendrées par un développement économique unilatéral; rappelons, par exemple, les exigences de mobilité de la main d'oeuvre qui méconnaissent les contraintes familiales; ou encore le dévoiement des symboles qui unissent le corps social, par des publicités commerciales; ou bien la décomposition du corps social par les exodes qui font proliférer les banlieues sans âme des mégapoles.

A partir du constat que la rationalité économique n'est qu'une rationalité de type opératoire, la grande tâche aujourd'hui semble être de penser le rapport de la rationalité de l'économie de marché avec les exigences de la cohésion du corps social. Selon quelle rationalité s'organise le lien social aujourd'hui? Comment et à quelles conditions, la rationalité économique peut-elle contribuer à l'organisation rationnelle du corps social au profit de l'homme dans ses dimensions individuelle et collective?

A la frontière de l'écologie humaine et de l'écologie naturelle se pose aussi la question de l'aménagement du territoire. Comment rendre compatible l'uniformité d'une économie mondialisée -tendant à ignorer de plus en plus le temps et l'espace - avec la diversité des paysages habités et cultivés par l'homme?

En Europe, le processus de transition vers la démocratie et l'économie de marché est encore au milieu du gué. Cela demande du temps et surtout un investissement plus grand pour développer la culture des droits humains et l'efficacité du droit, qui doivent pénétrer des secteurs entiers de la société, tels que la presse, l'administration, la justice, ainsi que la gestion de l'économie. L'histoire ne pardonnera pas aux sociétés qui minimisent ou ne prennent pas au sérieux les menaces que la corruption et le crime organisé font peser sur le développement social et économique de l'Europe d'aujourd'hui.

L'économie ne saurait être pour elle-même sa propre éthique. Afin que l'économie soit réellement au service de l'homme d'aujourd'hui - par la solidarité qui impose partage et frugalité dans la consommation des biens - et de demain - par le développement économique durable - il lui faut une certaine éthique.

Notre programme pour l'activité à venir de la Commission économique des Nations Unies pour l'Europe peut et doit trouver son inspiration dans le patrimoine commun de la culture et de la spiritualité européennes, ainsi que dans les liens qui ont fait, tout au long de l'histoire, la cohésion des peuples du continent. Les racines authentiques de notre patrimoine culturel et spirituel constituent la base de l'Europe de demain.

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR RUDOLPH THORNING-PETERSEN, PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE)

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure for me to address the Jubilee Session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe as the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE.

The emergence of new independent States in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall redesigned the European landscape. This new map meant new tasks and challenges for the international institutions. It further underlined the necessity of adapting to the needs of these new countries. Not least in the economic field. A key word in this respect was - and indeed still is - cooperation.

The OSCE is a security organization. The approach to economic issues should therefore be seen against this background with the primary focus on economic aspects of security.

The task of the OSCE is to give political impulses to enhance economic cooperation between the Participating States. The task is also to stimulate relevant work by specialized international organizations.

To achieve the optimal benefit of inter-organizational cooperation the OSCE aims at enhancing ties to mutually reinforcing international organizations. The document from the CSCE Summit in Helsinki in 1992 welcomes the existence of areas of common interest between the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the CSCE. This was the starting point for the closer cooperation with international organizations and in particular with the UN/ECE.

It is gratifying to note the ever increasing active cooperation between our institutions. The ECE has contributed to a number of OSCE activities under the Economic Dimension. Allow me to mention in this context the Economic Forum which has benefitted greatly from the active participation of the UN/ECE. We look forward to continuing our close contacts in the preparations for the Fifth Economic Forum in June.

The Economic Forum as well as the regional seminars are of particular importance as platforms for the exchange of information on economic issues of relevance not least to the counties in transition. Furthermore they add value to the important process of confidence building in the OSCE area.

It is our wish to strengthen further this excellent cooperation with the UN/ECE not only to the benefit of both our organizations but indeed to do our share in building a secure and stable environment for economic growth and prosperity in Europe.

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN INITIATIVE BY AMBASSADOR PAUL HARTIG, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE CEI CENTRE FOR INFORMATION AND DOCUMENTATION, TRIESTE

Tomorrow's discussion of item 4(c) of the Agenda, dealing with ECE cooperation with other institutions and sub-regional groupings in the ECE region, including the Central European Initiative, might have been the appropriate time for me to take the floor. But I am grateful for the opportunity of addressing the Commission on the auspicious occasion of its Jubilee Session under its key item "Strengthening of economic cooperation in Europe" leading to the adoption of a Declaration as well as a Plan of Action which aims at providing the ECE with a new thrust to facilitate and strengthen the involvement of all member countries in harmonious economic relations.

Cohesion in Europe as a political aspiration and the integration of economies as a result of concerted measures, as opposed to fragmentation, marginalization and disintegration, indeed these are the immense challenges we are facing in trying to contribute to the shaping of a harmonious, peaceful future of Europe and its people. However, it is not only the acceptance of democratic principles, and the transition to market economies, that allow a new approach of regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. There is also the chance of protecting and developing further the wealth of cultural plurality and its recognition as an "acquis européen", a value worth defending.

For the Central European Initiative, which is the oldest and largest of the sub-regional groupings in Central and Eastern Europe, the structural reform and strengthening of the ECE launched today is a particularly auspicious moment to start a more structured and intensified cooperation with this organization on the basis of complementarity and comparative advantages.

Let me now give you a very brief presentation of the CEI:

Established in 1989, even before the collapse of the east-west divide in Europe, as "quadrangular" (Austria, Italy, Hungary and Yugoslavia), it is composed today of 16 Member States (Albania, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine).

Cooperation is operated through conferences, seminars, workshops, studies, the elaboration of legal or political instruments, training courses and programmes of activities pursued by Working Groups or by Project Groups. Major fields of cooperation are: agriculture, environment, SMEs, tourism, antidrug policies and combatting organized crime, transport, minorities, migration, statistics, reconstruction and rehabilitation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

Decisions on the structure and orientation of the CEI are taken by the Heads of Government, meeting once a year and by meetings of the Foreign Ministers, the next such meeting being scheduled for 6-7 June in Sarajevo. Coordination of activities is assured by the Committee of National Coordinators which meets on a monthly basis, assisted by the CEI Centre in Trieste, and a Project Secretariat at the EBRD in London.

Of particular interest is the linkage of all Chambers of Commerce of the CEI Region and the establishment of a joint Secretariat in the CEI Centre for Information and Documentation in Trieste.

The CEI parliamentary dimension, the parliamentary Committee and the Parliamentary Conference of the CEI also hold annual meetings.

The CEI has established working relationships and cooperation with the European Union which at the Council meeting in Dublin adopted a report on EU - CEI cooperation prepared by the European Commission. The CEI has also embarked on establishing cooperation with other subregional groupings, the Council of Baltic Sea States and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. Closer cooperation on some specific issues is envisaged to be established with the OSCE. The CEI maintains contacts with a number of other subregional groupings which have been launched recently with a view to avoiding overlapping and duplication.

What are the primary objectives of the CEI? At the beginning of its creation in 1989 it was obviously aiming to build bridges across the ideological and political barriers that separated east and west in Europe. After the disappearance of the iron curtain new members joined the grouping which became known as "Pentagonal" and "Hexagonal". The major thrust of cooperation was adjusted to the new situation. Its main objectives were to facilitate the process of European integration and to work as an instrument for helping in the pre-accession strategy of the European Community.

Last year the grouping enlarged to 16 Member States and shifted its focus to the following three principal objectives: (1) strengthening cooperation among and between Member States; (2) strengthening the links to the main structures of European integration and lessening the impact of new barriers being built up in Europe; (3) assisting member countries in transition in the transformation process.

When we look closer at developments and present tendencies in Europe, the issue of enlargement of the EU and of NATO, or the impact of CEFTA on participating countries and on countries remaining outside, we have reason, I believe, to consider the future prospects of cohesion in Europe with concern. Indications are clearly showing a danger that major disparities in economic development and in per capita income levels in Europe will remain a characteristic feature of our Region for a long time to come.

This perspective might lead the CEI to refocus again its priority objectives. The Committee of Foreign Ministers, scheduled to meet in Sarajevo in June, might wish to orient activities undertaken in the various bodies of the CEI to concentrate in future in particular on assistance to the most needy, the weakest members of the Group, to the countries and societies of the Region which still have the lowest development standards.

For this endeavour the CEI hopes to establish systematic cooperation with other European organizations. The CEI will need in particular the experience of 50 years, the expertise of a new ECE. I am looking forward to this cooperation between the ECE and the CEI.

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE, BY MR. ROBIN GUTHRIE, DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

On behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, I join in congratulating the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations on its 50th Anniversary. With an eye to the 50th Anniversary of the Council of Europe in two years' time, I salute the courage and determination of this organization in facing not only the future of an uncertain world but also the challenges of its own internal organization. "Focus, flexibility, efficiency" is a motto for us all.

No organization can go it alone, least of all an international organization. We for our part benefit from and contribute to our relationships with the United Nations, the European Union, the OSCE, and the OECD as well as other international organizations. In the UN family, I would mention particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Centre for Human Rights, UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Development Programme; with all of these we have had creative and constructive working relationships, which I firmly believe have helped to make a difference in this troubled world.

Of the Economic Commission for Europe it is my particular pleasure to recall the European Regional Population Conference here in Geneva in 1993, which led to the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1995. "Europe Region" is widely defined in United Nations structures, and we found ourselves happily working with our North Atlantic allies in what I found to be a most fruitful relationship and one which made a tangible

contribution to the watershed that was Cairo. More recently, our own Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe worked with the ECE in the preparation of the HABITAT Conference in Istanbul in 1996; and there was a particularly close and fruitful partnership between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Economic Commission for Europe in the preparation of the Warsaw Conference of May last year on the progress of economic reform in central and eastern Europe. Meanwhile, we have been privileged to join in the meetings of the Administrative Committee on Cooperation, and to share with United Nations organizations, including the ECE, in tripartite meetings between the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the United Nations, the last of which occurred as recently as January of this year.

The Council of Europe is founded upon the three great principles of human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law. For all that we are an organization based on ideals, our work in every field is of a highly practical nature, whether it be concerned with human rights, democratic institutions, legal structures, social policies or cultural development. The Council of Europe's structure reflects the democratic institutions of its 40 member States: a Committee of Ministers, consisting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of each of the member States, and a Parliamentary Assembly, comprising delegations of parliamentarians appointed by each national parliament. However, we work also at the level of local and regional authorities and of non-governmental organizations, as well as with international organizations like your own.

In view of the Council of Europe's expanding membership, and its long-standing cooperation with the ECE, the Parliamentary Assembly decided in 1995 to strengthen its links with the ECE, notably by serving as the ECE's parliamentary forum for regular debates on its activities. The complementarity of our respective organizations will make this new relationship particularly useful.

I am convinced that it is only by the kind of courage and foresight that you have shown, and by the kind of dynamic cooperation that we have enjoyed with you, that Europe can truly grow as it should, not only in its own right but also as one of the great powers for human good.

I thank you, Executive Secretary, and all our colleagues for bringing us together at this moment in your history and in ours; I salute your courage in self-renewal; and I hope that you will always find in the Council of Europe a partner to complement your own skills and objectives and a worthy supporter of the ideals on which both our organizations are based.

STATEMENT BY MR. KJARTAN JÓHANNSSON, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE EUROPEAN FREE TRADE ASSOCIATION (EFTA)

First of all I would like to congratulate the ECE on its 50th Anniversary. At the same time let me say that I find it quite appropriate that you use this occasion to put your formal seal on the restructuring of the ECE thereby proving its ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Let me congratulate you on this so very important accomplishment.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellent relationship that my organization, EFTA, has enjoyed with the ECE over the years and our high regard for the quality of the work being carried out by the ECE.

The ECE and EFTA have some basic objectives in common, but they pursue them by different means. Both are preoccupied with promoting trade in order to achieve good neighbourliness and economic development. Both are committed to the goal of European integration. But we are not in competition, there is no overlap between our activities. We complement each other in furthering a common goal, each in its own way. There is a good understanding of each other's role. That is the foundation of our good relations.

I am favourably impressed by the catchwords used to describe the restructuring of the ECE: focus, flexibility and efficiency. They might be used at least partly to describe a recent restructuring of the EFTA Secretariat in the face of reduction in membership. Efficiency was certainly a high priority and we had to make the Secretariat lean. In this connection, let me recall that, while EFTA counts few member countries, they carry considerable economic weight, having a combined GDP of about 460 billion US dollars and a total foreign trade that amounts to over 250 billion dollars. They are affluent and have very sound economies. Consequently they constitute a big market and are interesting partners.

Earlier, I congratulated you on the restructuring of the ECE and adaptation to new circumstances. When I look over the history of EFTA I must say that, among other things, its ability to adapt has been remarkable. Allow me to recapitulate this development of evolution of EFTA in a few words, also in order to underline that just this particular trait is essential in an ever changing world.

EFTA was founded in 1960 to liberalize trade in industrial goods among its own members, and as a reaction to the establishment of the EEC. Even if we were successful in that objective, we soon found out that it was insufficient. Then we moved over the linking up our market with that of the EEC, with free trade agreements. This was to be benefit of both. But free trade as such was not enough, and we started cooperation with the EEC on dismantling non-tariff barriers to trade. Eventually, an agreement was reached on full integration of the EFTA countries into the internal market of the EC through an agreement on the European Economic Area. This demonstrates a step-by-step pragmatic integration process, which now applies to 3 of the 4 EFTA countries.

The early 1990s also saw the beginning of yet another process for the EFTA States, namely the establishment of formal links with non-EC countries, mostly in central and eastern Europe. When the EC started concluding European Agreements with those countries after the end of the cold war, the EFTA States established their own network of free trade agreements in the region. The EFTA countries wanted on their part to help central and east European countries to become market economies by establishing these new linkages and thus opening their markets to their exports. Furthermore, EFTA has provided technical assistance in the trade field, in some cases jointly with the EC.

Today the EFTA States have common contractual relations with no less than 17 non-EU countries. Fully-fledged free trade agreements with 12 countries: Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Turkey and Israel. Declarations on cooperation, the first step on the road to free trade, with five countries: Albania, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. Most recently, last December, the EFTA States signed a Declaration with the PLO on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

Some of the participants in this meeting spoke yesterday about networks in the context of European integration. That is exactly the phrase that we are using in EFTA. But networks must be connected. Let me give an example. The building up of parallel networks by EFTA and the EC with the CEECs soon revealed technical problems of compatibility with regard to product origin. To cope with this EFTA has pursued the goal of European cumulation. From the beginning of this year the problem has been eliminated with an agreement on pan-European cumulation encompassing the EU, EFTA and the CEECs States. This is a major accomplishment which will bring great economic benefits to all participants.

As you can gather from my former remarks EFTA has been active in promoting European integration, and you can be confident that it will continue in that role showing its willingness to gradually extend its network of partnership to other countries in Europe, and beyond, as for example demonstrated by our recent agreements with Mediterranean counties. In that context let me also mention that I believe that transition economies, including the NIS countries, can draw on EFTA experience in developing their internal relations, as well as linkages to the rest of Europe.

We in EFTA promote open regionalism. We do not see regionalism as an obstacle to global cooperation. Quite the contrary. It is a means to promote it. It is well known that the EFTA States have always been proponents of a strong multilateral trading system.

Today's discussion on "Avoiding breaklines in Europe" is central to the activities of both the ECE and EFTA. Both organizations are about building bridge, each in their own particular way. There is no overlap in their respective roles, they even complement each other. The ECE provides a vital framework for economic relations in Europe by providing reliable data and setting common standards, EFTA promotes the establishment of free trade in the region for the benefit of all who participate in it. The ECE Plan of Action before us aims to strengthen cooperation with regional organizations. For my part, I am more than willing to explore possibilities to achieve synergies with the ECE whenever appropriate.

Let us, however, keep in mind that Europe of today is not the Europe of yesterday, and certainly not the Europe of tomorrow. Our task is to make tomorrow better than today.

STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED PERSONS (AARP)

I am speaking on behalf of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a membership organization which represents 33 million individual members over age 50. AARP, which enjoys consultative status in the general category with ECOSOC, serves as an advocacy organization for current and future generations of older persons and promotes solidarity among all generations.

On behalf of AARP, I also wish to joint previous speakers in expressing our congratulations on the 50th anniversary of the ECE and express our best wishes for the success of its dynamic restructuring process. We have read with great interest the strategic directions expressed in the Declaration on the Strengthening of Economic Cooperation in Europe and the Plan of Action with its vision to facilitate the involvement of all member countries in harmonious economic relations and wish to make brief comments in this regard.

You might well ask what are the interests of an association such as ours, which represents the concerns of the older population, in the future activities of the ECE. Given that the rising numbers and proportions of older persons are posing new challenges and, we believe, also new opportunities, for the economies of the countries in this Region, it is not surprising that older men and women should be interested in following the work of this Commission. In this regard, we first wish to express our appreciation to the ECE secretariat for their collaboration in the organization of two workshops jointly sponsored by ECE and AARP, which focused on the situation of older persons in the ECE region, particularly those at risk of being marginalized and socially excluded. Both workshops stressed the importance of data and data analysis on the social and economic status of older persons in the region and resulted in a series of policy recommendations. We wish to commend the Population Unit of the ECE on their work and also thank the UN Population Fund for their interest and support for this programme.

Second, the emphasis of the documents before this session of the Commission is clearly on the important work in which the Commission is engaged in the area of economic cooperation and the strengthening of the economies in countries in transition. As pointed out in the Declaration on the Strengthening of Economic Cooperation in Europe, the purpose is to promote economic prosperity in an "unprecedented historical context, when all the Commission's members subscribe to the principles of democracy and the market economy". Surely the ultimate goal of economic prosperity is to benefit all members of society - young and old, men and women. Unfortunately, however, we also know that economic prosperity sometimes creates both winners and lowers. The effects of economic policies on various groups of the population should therefore be monitored and documented in policy relevant research, so that policies can be developed which ensure that everyone is a winner. We hope the ECE will ensure that the concerns of older persons are included in all economic analysis by looking at trends in labour market, pension, housing, consumer and other policies and by proposing policy recommendations which will benefit all generations as well as both current and future cohorts of older persons.

In closing may I remind you and the distinguished delegates at this session that the UN General Assembly has provided us with the unique opportunity to highlight the importance, the challenges and the achievements of population aging by declaring 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. Many countries in this region are already planning to mark this Year by organizing major events at the national level. The theme of the International Year is "Towards a Society for All Ages". We hope that, as the oldest Region of all the five Regions of the United Nations, the ECE will take the appropriate steps in order to challenge our collective thinking on how to create such a society as we enter the 21st century.

DECLARATION DU GROUPE DE TRAVAIL ONG POUR LES FEMMES

Je prends la parole au nom du Conseil International des Femmes et des autres organisations non-gouvernementales qui font partie du Groupe de Travail ONG pour les femmes dans la région de la CEE.

Nous vous avons déjà adressé un message à l'occasion du 50e anniversaire de la Commission, cependant nous tenons à vous redire encore ici nos sincères félicitations pour tout le travail accompli et les résultats obtenus par la CEE au cours de ce demi-siècle dans des conditions souvent difficiles. Ces félicitations s'étendent pour le moment présent à l'heureux achèvement des travaux de réforme de la Commission et aux projets de rapide mise en oeuvre de cette réforme.

Nous avons lu avec le plus grand intérêt le Plan d'Action et voudrions faire à ce propos la remarque suivante :

A la suite de la décision prise l'an dernier, qui engage les organes subsidiaires principaux à intégrer une démarche tenant compte des sexo-spécificités, lorsqu'ils définiront et exécuteront leurs programmes de travail, nous avons pris contact avec certains de ces organes (en particulier avec le Comité pour le développement du commerce). Et nous envisageons une collaboration plus intense à l'avenir au sujet des projets en cours dans ce domaine. C'est donc avec une grande satisfaction que nous avons pris connaissance du chapitre II du Plan d'action intitulé "Questions intersectorielles" qui cite, parmi les questions présentant un intérêt particulier pour les travaux de la CEE, "l'intégration du souci d'équité entre les sexes dans les activités principales".

A notre connaissance, la plupart des autres commissions régionales ont déjà entrepris d'intégrer dans leurs travaux cette perspective sexo-spécifique et nous souhaitons vivement que la CEE elle-même et les Etats membres prennent davantage en considération ce problème.

L'étendue de la contribution des femmes, notamment dans les domaines de l'économie, de l'environnement, des établissements humains tout comme dans le développement du commerce, de l'industrie et de l'entreprise ne peut plus être mise en question. Nous tenons à souligner également combien il est important d'établir des statistiques différenciées en fonction du sexe, ce qui est reconnu par la Commission elle-même.

En conclusion sur ce point, nous assurons la Commission de notre appui dans sa recherche d'instaurer par de nouveaux moyens des synergies avec les ONG.

Par ailleurs, nous relevons que la Commission de la condition de la femme, dans sa session qui s'est achevée le 18 mars dernier, a abouti à des conclusions détaillées concernant l'application de la Plate-forme d'action de Beijing, notamment dans les domaines de l'environnement et de l'économie (doc. E/CN.6/1997/L.2 et 3).

Dans le premier domaine, elle rappelle que, sans la reconnaissance de la contribution des femmes à la protection de l'environnement, celle-ci restera un objectif insaisissable. Elle demande donc que les gouvernements et les organisations internationales abordent tous les problèmes de la protection et de la conservation de l'environnement sous l'angle de la participation des hommes et des femmes à leur solution.

En matière économique, la Commission de la condition de la femme attire, entre autres objectifs, l'attention sur le fait que les petites et moyennes entreprises dirigées par des femmes créent des emplois, apportent des innovations et contribuent à la croissance; de ce fait, elles méritent d'être soutenues.

Il convient, ajoute encore la Commission, de lutter contre la ségrégation professionnelle, d'accroître le nombre des femmes-cadres supérieurs dans les entreprises par des mesures ciblées ainsi que d'évaluer les effets sur les femmes des politiques économiques, de restructuration et de libéralisation.

Les conclusions de le Commission de la condition de la femme seront transmises à l'ECOSOC lors de sa prochaine réunion. Elles seront valables pour toutes les institutions du système des Nations Unies. Nous formons le voeu que ces institutions soient de mieux en mieux coordonnées et que leurs résolutions respectives soient de mieux en mieux appliquées à un niveau général.

SUMMARY OF THE ROUND TABLE ON "BUILDING COHESION IN EUROPE: TECHNICAL ANSWERS TO A POLITICAL ASPIRATION"

The Economic Commission for Europe has a long tradition of promoting inter-governmental cooperation on technical or "nuts and bolts" issues as a means of promoting economic and political integration and this work has been maintained in the face of considerable variations in the international political climate. The Chairman of the Round Table, Mr. K. Lotz, Minister of Transport, Telecommunication and Water Management of Hungary, argued that over the years ECE had built up a strong comparative advantage in providing the means (an experienced secretariat, a well-established forum, etc.) for promoting the cohesion of Europe through technical cooperation. But more should be done to eliminate the habit of bi-polar thinking, which persisted on many issues, and to raise the level of cooperation in areas such as sustainable development, environmental problems, economic analysis, statistical issues, and trade facilitation. Mr. Lotz also underlined the importance of a more active participation of the private business sector in ECE's activities in fields such as transport and trade facilitation. The Chairman asked the other panellists to comment on both the positive and negative effects of European integration on ECE members and to suggest ways in which ECE could help to reduce any negative impact.

Mr. V.D. Khandogii, Deputy Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, denied that there could be any negative impact from European integration and so he focused on both its necessity and its benefits. He argued that local and national governments' inability to find technical solutions in support of political goals frequently arose because political objectives were not always in line with economic realities: the resulting frustrations often lead to domestic unrest and political instability. He stressed the need for a comprehensive security system in which key roles would be played by a number of institutions including NATO, the EU, the OSCE, and the UN/ECE. The ECE could continue to promote cooperation in a number of areas and thereby assist the countries of the region to integrate in the global economy. ECE's long experience and accumulated expertise, as well as its transatlantic dimension, could help to maintain it as an effective mechanism for cohesion in Europe.

Mr. V. Serov, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Federation, also stressed the need for institutions to assist the transition economies in their efforts to integrate with the global economy. He stressed the need to review and assess the relevance of western economic experience for the transition economies and argued that ECE was irreplaceable as an institution that provided a bridge between west and eastern Europe by encouraging the adoption of common norms and standards, etc. But he also warned ECE against limiting its role to just the provision of technical advice and a forum for cooperation. It should be seen as a pan-European organization involved in a wide range of practical policy matters. Mr. Serov stressed the importance of fair dialogue and the development of a common economic language as important ingredients of successful cooperation.

Mr. Janez Stanovnik, former Executive Secretary of the ECE, also stressed the importance of a "fair dialogue" among equal partners and of continuing to de-mystify many issues that had been clouded by the ideological conflicts of the cold-war period. He too remarked on ECE's historical role as a bridge between East and West and argued that its present role was to help the eastern economies integrate into different institutional frameworks and to help them cope with the short-run costs of international integration so they could reap the longer term benefits. ECE could play a unique role in doing this through its conference diplomacy and he stressed three key aspects: one, technical cooperation should be seen as leading to confidence-building measures; two, high priority should be given to the elaboration of common procedures for international trade which created benefits for all; and three, another priority should be the identification of technical issues and areas which are key for the mutual interest and interdependence of member countries.

Mrs. L. Castellina, Chairman of the External Relations Committee of the European Parliament, was concerned at the possible impacts of both NATO and EU enlargement to the east and warned against creating a Europe with a single authority "rotating around Brussels". She argued that the EU must not become a club of the privileged as a result of a selective integration process, which encouraged the dangerous practice of countries trying to distance themselves from their neighbours and could lead to racial tensions and the isolation of some countries in the region. Mrs. Castellina was concerned that it would be increasingly difficult to maintain democratic processes within an enlarged EU and she queried whether enlargement was

actually relevant in a world where global markets were more important than regional ones. Integration in this new world was increasingly taking the form of intersecting networks of interaction rather than being organized as a set of concentric circles around an all-dominant centre. It was in this context that UN/ECE could help in articulating a new regional framework and preventing the construction of new "walls" between groups of countries. In attempting this, ECE's long experience in keeping east-west communication alive would be one of its major strengths.

Mrs. Castellina's remarks were echoed by two contributions from the floor. The German Ambassador [Mr. Höynck] also emphasised the need to recognize the existence of overlapping circles of integration and cooperation, including those in the CIS and the Black Sea region. Where these different integration processes did not overlap, there was a clear role for institutions such as UN/ECE, with its comprehensive membership, in building bridges between them and linking the various networks. The German Ambassador also followed Mrs. Castellina in arguing that there was no longer a single Europe; instead, we should adopt a pluralistic approach to the problems at hand and to developing new structures to manage them. Above all, a "fortress Europe" must be avoided. The Austrian Ambassador [Mr. Kreid] followed the German Ambassador in stressing the overlapping of multiple networks of cooperation and said that there was an important role for ECE in ensuring "the permeability" of such structures and the development of cooperation between them.

The Chairman closed the Round Table by reiterating this stress on the variety of integration processes at work in the European region - a term which all participants agreed no longer had any precise geographical meaning - and the important role that ECE could play in helping to build a new cohesion among them.

SUMMARY OF THE ROUND TABLE ON "ECE: FORGING PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS, ENTERPRISES AND NGOs"

The chairman of the Round Table, Mr. D. Rosati, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, declared that the purpose of the Round Table was to determine how the ECE could further respond to the growing need for interaction between Governments, the business community and NGOs. He argued that globalization was bringing new challenges which States could not face only on their own, hence the importance of promoting cooperation with the private sector, NGOs and local communities, and there were signs that, on its side, the business community wished to foster such cooperation within the ECE framework.

He then addressed the following three questions to the speakers: Which were the areas where interaction between governments, the private sector, NGOs and local communities, was required? What forms of cooperation, which ECE had organized, had proved particularly beneficial? How could ECE foster these cooperative activities in the future?

Mr. Auken, Minister for Environment of Denmark, described the very useful role which ECE had played in fostering cooperation between governments and civil society in one of its conventions which was currently under negotiation and dealt with environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making. If implemented properly and effectively by Governments, this Convention would, he predicted, help the transition economies in building a democratic civil society, sensitive to and supportive of sustainable development.

Mr. Svinarenko, Deputy Minister of Economy of the Russian Federation, referring to the experience of his country, outlined three theses on partnerships between governments and civil society: (i) successful partnerships had to be based on a common understanding between civil society, the private sector and governments; (ii) other preconditions were, in particular, equality of economic relationships, transparency and clarity in legislation; and, finally (iii) a commonality of interest must exist between countries.

As an example of successful partnerships within his country, he mentioned the Advisory Group gathering domestic and foreign investors which met regularly at the highest level with the Russian Government. He argued that this initiative had reduced the amount of time needed for taking decisions. ECE activities where partnerships had been successfully forged included: the Gas Centre; Trade Facilitation (UN/EDIFACT) and the Round Table Conference on Sustainable Industrial Development which was held during last year's Commission session. He recommended that, in the future, such cooperation should focus on specific areas. He then suggested that ECE's Principal Subsidiary Bodies identify these areas and that, for each of them, specific arrangements be organized for developing cooperation between governments and the private sector in these specific areas.

Mr. Pavloschi, Vice-President of the Romanian Gas Corporation, speaking as a representative of the business community, described the work of the UN/ECE Gas Centre as an example of ECE's role in forging partnerships between governments and the enterprise sector. The Gas Centre, according to this speaker, fulfilled three functions: (i) as a vehicle for European integration; (ii) as a source of technical assistance to transition economies; (iii) as a means of promoting good neighbourly relationships within the region. More generally, he declared that partnership between the State and enterprises was particularly needed in the energy sector of transition economies as restructuring was leading to substantial downsizing and loss of employment, for example in coal activities.

Mr. Levy, Chairman of the Swiss Office for Trade Promotion (OSEC), described the role that governments and non-governmental organizations played in fixing standards and the importance of organizations such as the ECE which offered a platform for such standard-setting activities across a wide spectrum of sectors. Implementation of these standards, he pointed out, was not only the role of government but also involved the private sector; furthermore, it benefitted not just large firms but also SMEs.

Mr. Haegi, President of the Foundation for the Economy and Sustainable Development of the Regions of Europe (FEDRE) and President of the Congress of local and regional authorities of Europe (Council of Europe), discussed cooperation at the level of cities and regions and noted the importance of forging links between regions despite various obstacles and barriers. He commented on the role which ECE was playing in helping FEDRE to facilitate contact between regions. He further declared that solutions to more and more acute problems, such as in the area of the environment, had to be resolved through cooperation between the State and local authorities and that the ECE could play a part in facilitating the necessary contacts in this respect.

Following these opening remarks by the panellists, a number of questions were addressed to the speakers.

One question concerned the usefulness of ECE continuing to provide economic advice to governments from transition countries when so much advice of this type was already available. Mr. Svinarenko replied that ECE's advice, as found in its economic analysis, was of the highest quality. In the case of Russia, it was eagerly awaited by experts. ECE needed to continue its work in this area because it was the best source of economic information.

In reply to a question on the application of the model of the Gas Centre to other areas of activities, Mr. Pavloschi declared that the Centre was providing extremely useful services to the public and private gas companies of all concerned countries in the region. Its format, he said, could be used in other industries and sectors, provided that funding could be found.

Another participant asked whether Switzerland offered a model for promoting SMEs. Mr. Levy replied that there was no single model but that Switzerland combined various key elements - government involvement, self-help, strong decentralization - of a strategy aimed at supporting its SME sector. This, however, did not mean that Switzerland did not have problems, for example on the financing of start-up companies. He proposed that ECE could be a useful forum for exchanging information on practical measures for stimulating the creation of SMEs.

Several speakers stressed that ECE suffered from poor visibility despite the profound and beneficial changes which the organization had induced in the everyday lives of the citizens of its member countries. ECE was addressing this problem by producing brochures that provided useful information for the general public on the role of ECE in economic developments in the region. It was also increasing its visibility to the business community by involving it in a wide range of activities, particularly in the fields of trade, investment, enterprise development and energy.

In summing up the discussion, the Chairman noted that this Round Table provided compelling evidence of actual ECE-instigated projects involving cooperation between governments and the business community and of their value to member countries. He drew the following lessons from the discussion:

1. All the speakers agreed that there was a need for interaction between various actors. The problems facing governments could not be solved by themselves. Nor could they be left to be solved exclusively by the market mechanisms.

2. ECE was a good platform for forging such interaction. The Round Table identified the grounds - e.g. conventions, norms and standards etc. - for ECE to be an appropriate institution where this dialogue could take place.

3. There was a need to focus on specific projects and an obligation on the part of the secretariat and the ECE delegations to come up with new ideas for activities in those specific areas where such partnerships could be developed.

4. Western governments had more experience that the transition economies in working with NGOs and the private sector. The ECE could therefore play a useful role in making known the positive experiences of countries such as Denmark and Switzerland, mentioned in this debate, to the countries with transition economies.